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WHITEPATCH.

A ROMANCE FOR QUIET PEOPLE.

"Il faudrait avoir le courage de ne se préoccuper ni des succès du salon ni de l'opinion de la presse, ni de l'éventualité des récompenses, et ne s'inquiéter que de se contenter soi-même."—ALFRED STEPHENS, *Impressions sur la Peinture.*

"Wholesomeness is the salt of life."—*Spanish Proverb.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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WHITEPATCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEROINE TAKES TO NOVEL READING, AND MRS. JENKINS IS GOING TO BE MARRIED.

The letter from Harrison, which the Colonel conveyed to Spillett, contained various instructions. Among them was the medical treatment of the Colonel and Mary—the medicines would be found in a drawer in his room. The Colonel was to have belladonna and ignatia, a dose of each put together in the bottom of his teacup every morning (this Harrison had read in one of his books was a great

tonic for the nerves of elderly people in distress). She herself was to take arnica, if she found herself overworked. Miss Mary must be amused. She must fetch her some good novels from Canterbury, and get her out into the small garden if she could manage it at night after dark, but she was to beware most of Nancy; Mrs. Jenkins was only a fool. If Miss Mary got very low, she was to make her drink a little champagne. She, Spillett, was to write to him as often as she could. He should expect the letter for the Colonel. If it wasn't written, it must be directly. She was to see that John didn't drink too much beer.

Mary was reassured a little by her grandfather's quiet return, and was kept well informed as time went on of the efforts that were being made to find her. She was alarmed lest the detective should

come down; but Spillett had no fear of that. If he did come he wouldn't find anything. Real detectives were very different from detectives in novels. And if he did find anything—well, she wasn't a woman if she couldn't get round him! She should bring him up to see Miss Mary, and he would never be able to resist her. He would only think it was a good joke and go away laughing.

Mary had some talent for painting interiors, and she had made some charming studies of the old house. Spillett persuaded her to begin one of the Priest's rooms; but she could not shake off her sadness or reconcile herself to the doubtful propriety of her conduct, which clashed with her straightforward nature now that her anger had calmed down; and she could not see how her grandfather was to be

brought round. Spillett was confident that he would be. "The only way to bend obstinate people was to soak them well in hot water like other tough things, and he hadn't had half enough of it yet!" She exerted herself to the utmost to cheer her prisoner.

"You must read some amusing stories, Miss Mary. Mrs. Jenkins subscribes regularly to Mr. Qwill's library, and is always having over a box of novels, and I am quite certain your aunt reads every one of them; but she will hardly speak to me now, and I am not going to ask her for any again. I shall go over to Canterbury and get some for myself, and you can read them, too, Miss Mary."

"Poor grandpapa! what would he think of me if he knew, Spillett?"

"That's all moonshine, Miss Mary; you

are not a child now. I don't believe there's another young lady in all Kent that doesn't read novels, and the parson's daughters most of any."

"But are they not rather wicked, Jenny?"

"Not at all, Miss Mary!—if they don't make one idle and lazy. It's only like eating stuff that doesn't feed you very much—you can't live upon them—though some do till they get so lazy they can't sit up without an armchair. Some of the old ones up in the library are very wicked, I know, because Mrs. Jenkins stole the Colonel's key when he and father stayed up in London about your mare; but when she and Miss Doddingstead began to read them together, your aunt made her take them back directly. Mrs. Jenkins told Mrs. Harrison, and she told me."

"Does grandpapa read novels, Spillett?"

"Of course he does, Miss Mary—all the old ones. He has always got one of them in his room, mostly Walter Scott's; and I believe Nancy reads them when she is doing the room in the morning; but the Colonel never thinks anything that's old can be wrong. Old books are classics, you know; besides, he is an old gentleman, and they won't do him any harm. Any one may read Walter Scott."

Mary looked very much astonished; but it was news to her that her grandfather read novels at all.

"And the new ones, Spillett?"

"Oh, any one can read them, Miss Mary. The French girls at Madame de Gros's wouldn't look at them because they are not wicked enough. Mademoiselle Julie used to say they were 'toe goody-goody.'"

Mary's conscience was much appeased

by hearing that her grandfather read novels, and she said she would not mind reading *one*.

Spillett went over to Canterbury, and brought her "Ivanhoe," "Mansfield Park," "Vanity Fair," "Pickwick," and "Jane Eyre;" and Mary, once fairly launched in the delightful wickedness of novel reading, gave herself up to it with all the ardour of novel-denied eighteen.

The arrival of the Hon. Dick caused her some amusement; and Spillett informed her of his invasion of the little garden, and how she had stood to have her portrait painted for her. But she did not think it necessary to inform her young mistress that she had refused a future coronet which might have been her own if she had so wished.

Public curiosity about Mary subsided on

the knowledge that she had become a nun or "something of that sort," and hardly any one now made an excuse to come up to Mary's rooms as they had done at first. But Spillett did not relax her precautions, as she knew she had watchful enemies in the house. Mary, however, went down after dark for a turn in her little garden every evening, but Spillett insisted on the white dress, and she kept a warm cloak and hat for her in the summer house.

One evening Jenkins rushed on her fate. This virgin had long given her by no means virgin heart to Spillett's father, who was still a remarkably good-looking man, and, as fair men often do, looked young for his age; but with many sighs she had to confess to herself that "she must pine in secret," as, be as coaxing as she would, Mr. Spillett did not seem in the least "moved towards her."

One evening Mr. Spillett came in to look for his daughter. He seldom came to the house; he preferred keeping to himself, and had little sympathy with "servants' gossip." But his daughter had not yet come down to tea, and Eliza invited him to have a cup in the housekeeper's room. He accepted. Still his daughter did not appear. But, thorough gentleman as he was at heart, he made himself very gracious and agreeable to Jenkins in consequence of the public snub she had received in his daughter's favour. He stayed on and on, and the virgin's heart bounded with renewed hope. She would put her pride in her pocket and do the right thing, and go up and tell Mrs. Spillett that her father was waiting to see her.

She then took a candle and went by the back stairs up to the passage that led to

Mary's staircase. Mary that evening, as soon as it was dark, went down to the garden, and left Spillett busy at work in the Priest's rooms. But she was deep in "Ivanhoe," and after a few hasty turns she returned again to see what would happen to Rebecca in the castle of Front de Boeuf. She took off her jacket and hat as usual, and went up the stairs and through the door into her little hall. She was standing quietly at the door of the closet, and feeling in her pocket for her matches and piece of wax-candle, by which she lighted herself through the passages, when Jenkins came towards her with a lighted candle in her hand. Mary preserved her presence of mind, looked full at her, and advanced slowly as Spillett had directed. Jenkins did not stop an instant. She gave a loud scream, bolted to the stairs, rushed down

again to the housekeeper's room, and threw herself into the arms of the astonished Mr. Spillett. He deposited his fair burden as soon as he could on a chair, and Eliza fanned her and made her drink a little tea. As soon as Jenkins could recover her speech, she exclaimed—

"Oh! I have seen her, Mr. Spillett! I have seen her; and that means I am to be married!" And she cast famished looks of love on the unfortunate Spillett, who was greatly at a loss to know "what had happened to the old fool."

She then described the maiden as she had heard her described before, and how "she looked at me exactly as Miss Mary looks." Spillett became very thoughtful, and shortly after took his leave. He vowed as he walked to the stable he "would never make himself agreeable again to such an

inflammable old idiot;" but he had also a half suspicion that Miss Mary was somewhere about the house after all.

Spillett was greatly amused at Mary's adventure, and still more so when she heard Eliza's account of what had happened below stairs; but she thought none of the other maids would venture up there after dark again, "though there was no saying; some women would cut off their heads to get married."

The time passed rapidly, and though Mary had an occasional breakdown, Spillett, with the assistance of the novels, got her through the ordeal without serious detriment. The black ring-tailed monkey arrived, but Mary would not take to it, nor even troubled herself to see it more than once, though it had a beautiful jet-black coat and a remarkable tail. Spillett had to

keep it in the rooms downstairs, where the poor little brute, who was also an accomplished artist, passed a very melancholy time separated from his troupe and the gay life to which he had been accustomed. She also neglected her painting, and it was nothing but novels, novels, from morning till late at night; till even Spillett wondered at the transformation she had created, and had to be very active to keep her well supplied.

Mary admired Miss Austen. Her artist's nature appreciated very soon the finish and the quiet greatness of that authoress so often strangely hid from even cultivated and intelligent people. Spillett thought her slow and not romantic enough; and a brisk discussion arose between these amateur critics, which had its points of view nevertheless.

Mary had been allowed to read reviews of the best kind, and for years she had been forming in her mind her own judgment and theory of what a novel ought to be.

Spillett also read reviews, but she had the advantage of also reading the books themselves, and it was highly to her credit that she had never tempted Mary to read any novels before.

"No, Spillett, I don't think she is slow at all; but she doesn't splash up, as you say, and I am sure she is perfectly true to everyday life. Then, she creates characters that you will remember as if they were people, you know; and only real genius does that, they say."

"Yes, but that's just it, Miss Mary; one doesn't want everyday life, however well it may be told. One can see that for one's self.

I am sure most people like to feel when they are reading a novel as if they were at a theatre,—they don't want anything real, and as tiresome as a rule-of-three sum, because it must be exact."

"But it is not good art, Spillett, to make things upside down and impossible—like a monkey with his tail growing out of his mouth."

"Well, but that's amusing to see. Who cares for a monkey with his tail in the right place, except it's you, Miss Mary? Novels are like monkeys, after all—they are only made for our amusement; and one gets tired of always the same thing. They meet, they fall in love, and then they die, or live happy for ever over a cradle and a pipe of tobacco!"

"That is a very low view to take, Jenny. Art is founded on great princi-

ples of truth to nature, that must be obeyed even more than the laws of the country."

"Ah well, Miss Mary, I don't think most people trouble themselves about that, however much they may pretend to. Most people want to be interested and amused, and forget their quarrel with Mrs. Brown, and their bill to Mr. Smith; and as long as they get that they are content to leave the rest to the critics—and a nice time they must have of it I should think, trying to set people to rights! It's as bad as being housekeeper; people would rather anything than be set to rights."

"Miss Van Tromp says the critics in these days are mostly highly educated gentlemen, and very fair compared to what they used to be; and they have to work much harder too, as they are like men who

have to go on building up a great wall to keep back a deluge."

"Oh, I have no fault to find with the critics, Miss Mary, except that they are too fond of making a fuss over little things that don't interest any one but themselves."

"And I like Sir Walter Scott."

"So do I, Miss Mary; there is a lot of go about him, he writes like a man, and a man that sees things big. The novels I can't bear are those where they spend two chapters in finicking about, and telling you what one person thought about nothing in particular, and what some one else didn't think about at all; and then you move on a little bit and begin finicking again."

"I think I should rather like that, Spillett."

"Well, Miss Mary, some people like to live on slops, particularly if they are

nicely cooked up! I don't. But of course tastes differ as much as jellies and roast mutton."

"What do you think of 'Jane Eyre?' Have you read it, Spillett?"

"Years ago, Miss Mary! Father bought it. I think it's splendid! What do you think?"

"I am not quite sure that I really like it. I expect it's more a man's book; and then I can't help thinking it's a little ill-natured. Miss Van Tromp says the really great geniuses are never ill-natured, though they are sometimes cruel; I suppose, though, it's what they call intense—and all the great poets are that. Dante is tremendous; he makes you feel as if you were being carried down into the infernal regions with him, particularly when you read him in the Italian."

"I shall read Dante, Miss Mary. I should rather like being carried down there for a short time, if it was only to see the sort of people who are there—one never knows. I expect we shall be nicely surprised when we go to one place or the other some fine day!"

Mary smiled gently at the idea of her practical maid reading Dante.

"I think you had better recommend it to Jenkins!"

"Why, Miss Mary?"

Mary smiled again, but did not give any reason.

"And 'Adam Bede'?"

"Oh, that's delightful! And Mrs. Poyser! I know her by heart. Father always says I am imitating Mrs. Poyser when I say sharp things; perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't—I can't say. Things come into

my head when I am talking, and they run away with me."

"I don't think I *quite* like 'Adam Bede,' either. I expect that's another man's book; and I suppose when the men say we must think a book good, we must; but they can't make us *like* it—that is quite different. I know she is a great genius and all that, but there is a *something*—I can't explain what it is exactly—something that a woman would feel and a man would not, and that I don't find either in Sir Walter Scott or Dickens nor in Miss Austen. And yet I suppose clever men must like her."

"I think I know what you mean, Miss Mary. She is like a woman in man's clothes. Men like that, but we don't; but I must get you 'Silas Marner,' that's perfect. I must go now, Miss Mary, or there will be something wrong; the Colonel has

got so fidgety about his dinner, Eliza is in despair. It's harder work housekeeping than you'd think," said Jenny, turning back again, " and I haven't yet made them quite forget that I was only your maid; but they are very nice to me considering all things, except Mrs. Jenkins, and now she is worse than ever, as father gets out of her way as if she had got the plague. But she told Eliza that she was sure she was going to be married soon, come what may; and she will be sighing and throwing her lobster eyes at Mr. Harrison when he comes back now. She hasn't any chance there! I know who will be the next Mrs. Harrison, and that's Eliza. She's taking his little medicines all day, and they will suit each other very well too, as Eliza is the same as Mrs. Harrison—she likes being ordered about by a man, and they

will make a fine couple. For, although she isn't exactly handsome, she has got a very pleasant, comfortable sort of a face, and what men think so much of—a fine big figure. Eliza is clever, too, in her way; and I should not be the least surprised if Mr. Harrison won't be wanting to make her housekeeper some day. Well, I don't care, it takes up a lot of time. I am getting into rags, and I was just as happy quiet up here with you, Miss Mary. I don't think father would mind either. I know what he would like, and that's to have me come and take care of him. And when you marry, that might be—you wouldn't miss me much then; so I give you three months' warning on the spot, ma'am!" And she made a grand curtsy and ran off, leaving Mary to "The Antiquary," a good fire, and the delightful sense of no one being able to disturb her.

CHAPTER II.

JENNY SPILLETT IS PUT TO CONFESSION.

On the afternoon on which the Colonel heard of the death of Sir John Wyldeman, Jenny ran up to her young mistress with a high colour in her face to relate the following news.

Captain Huntingcroft had arrived unexpectedly from town, and had been out to see her father. "He says that some great lawyer in London has told him that father can recover the whole of the property at Ixstead and Shrimpgate, if he goes to law about it. Father says he doesn't believe it. Captain Huntingcroft wanted to know if

he had any papers, and he got down his old chest out of the hay-loft, and they turned over all the papers in it, but they couldn't make much out of them. Captain Huntingcroft is going to take them up to London for the lawyers to see. Father says Captain Huntingcroft wanted to buy Ixstead, and that when his lawyers came to look at the deeds they declared there was something wrong, and that the Levys had no real right to the property."

"That is wonderful news, Jenny! I do hope it is true.—But what does Captain Huntingcroft want to buy Ixstead for?"

Jenny made no answer, and her face became a vivid scarlet.

A sudden suspicion darted into Mary's head.

"Jenny, it has something to do with you. Why do you remain silent?"

Jenny still made no answer.

"Is Captain Huntingcroft the gentleman in the Guards you used to meet in London?" continued Mary, still further light breaking in upon her.

Jenny busied herself about the room, but made no reply. She knew Mary's great delicacy of feeling, and trusted she would not press the question home.

But Mary's suspicions were more and more confirmed; her interest also was highly excited, and her strong sense of friendliness resented what she thought a poor return for her own openness with her old friend and companion.

"Jenny," she said, starting up with a little flash of fire in her soft eyes, and taking hold of her two hands, "sit down and tell me the truth directly!"

The two young women sat down together

on the bed, Mary still holding her friend's hands, and looking earnestly at her.

"Oh, Miss Mary," she said, tears coming into her eyes, "you are very good to me, but you have trouble enough of your own! Why should I burden you with mine—when it can be of no use?"

"No use! I do not understand. What do you mean?"

"I mean it can never come to anything."

"What can never come to anything?" said Mary, determined that Jenny should make her own avowal.

After a few moments' silence and a hard struggle with herself, Mary still searching her with her eyes, Jenny said, in a low voice—

"Between Captain Huntingcroft and me."

"Then it *was* Captain Huntingcroft you

knew in London!" cried Mary, releasing Jenny's hands and sitting a little further from her, that she might have a better survey of the culprit.

"Yes," said Jenny softly, avoiding her friend's searching eyes.

"Then why did you not tell me that before?"

Jenny remained silent.

"Jenny!" cried Mary, with an impatient stamp of her foot.

"Because, dear Miss Mary," she replied, driven at last to extremities, "I am certain at one time he wanted to marry you."

"What nonsense! What absurd jealousy and nonsense! I am sure such a thing never entered his head. But that shows me you are fond of him, Jenny. It is better to tell me the whole truth."

"Well, Miss Mary, when I knew him in London, I knew he was a little fond of me, and wanted to do all sorts of things; but that of course I—— And then, when he came down here after the ball, I know quite well he took a fancy to you——"

"It was no such thing, Jenny. He came entirely to help his friend!"

"I know better, dear Miss Mary," replied Jenny, with a sad look. "I watched you together several times out of the window, and I know his ways so well!"

"It is not true! it is not true! It is your absurd jealousy. I am certain I should have known if—if he had been feeling anything in that way."

Jenny smiled sadly. "You were thinking too much of your own affairs to notice it, Miss Mary."

Mary reflected a moment that the Hon.

Dick's manner had certainly changed towards her latterly, but she kept the reflection to herself.

"Well, then, what has happened?" she continued presently.

Jenny after a pause said—

"He has offered to marry me."

"Well?" said Mary, with a charming glance of friendly interest.

"And—I refused him."

"Refused him! He is the kindest and best of men! Pray what fine notion have you got in your head, that you should refuse Captain Huntingcroft, when you know that you care for him, and he pays you such an honour?" said this ardent young Radical.

"That is just it, Miss Mary. I am afraid I do care for him too much." And she gave her young mistress an

account of her interviews with the Hon. Dick, and the reasons for her refusing him, with which the reader is already acquainted.

"It is all pride, Jenny; and you and your father are only fit to live in a cave and be fed by ravens!" remarked Mary.

"Indeed, Miss Mary, it is not that; though there may be a little of it. I love him too well to drag him down by marrying a servant, and I love him too well to be happy if he should not always remain constant. I am quite sure there is no misery a woman can tumble into like that of marrying a man she is really fond of who is not always true to her. I would rather be a drudge all my life in a back kitchen! It is not hardship or poverty that kills a woman—it is having her love turned back upon her like a poison! I see and observe

more than most people, and I am *certain* that in marriage women get the worst of it. If she is fortunate, she is the happiest of women; if not—oh, God! she is the most miserable! The woman, if she respects herself, *can't* speak, can do *nothing!* A man, he can go off and find what he wants elsewhere."

She spoke with such earnest energy, that Mary remained silent. She took her in her arms, and the strong Jenny laid her fair head on her friend's tender young bosom and sobbed like a child.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN HUNTINGCROFT DIGS FOR HIMSELF TWO MORE PITFALLS.

That evening after dinner over their wine the Colonel and the Hon. Dick fell into serious conversation on several matters.

First, they discussed again more fully the affairs of John Spillett. The Colonel was somewhat incredulous. Dick maintained that his father's solicitors, Heavy and Young, were first-rate people, and did not discover mares' nests; and they were certain that the sale of the Ixstead property to the Levys had been the act of an idiot or a madman. The price given was out of all

proportion to the value of the property; it was strictly entailed, and there was no deed whatever to show that the entail had been been cut off. The heirs must have been strangely careless also not to have discovered it at once. He had told them what he had heard from the Colonel, of John Spillett's grandfather dying in a madhouse, and of his wild life previously. Heavy and Young thought that would be sufficient, if it could be proved by letters or documents of the time, and the neglect of the lawful heirs to make their claim could be accounted for. That was the weak point.

"But Spillett has no money to go to law with," said the Colonel.

"Our solicitors say, Colonel, that they do not think it will be necessary to go to law. The case of illegal purchase is so

clear that the Levys will be glad to compromise the matter on almost any terms; and the present man in possession is the son only of the original purchaser. Our men say that it is known to this day that the solicitors who managed the transaction were noted disreputable firms and money-lenders on both sides, and that they must have connived together to take advantage of the vendor's weakness of mind."

"It appears to me," remarked the Colonel, "that the failure of Tom Spillett, our John's father, to claim his rights, will go greatly against them."

"I mentioned that to Spillett to-day," replied the Hon. Dick, "but he says his father was nearly as mad and careless as his grandfather."

"Yes, indeed!" said the Colonel; "and I

can prove that for one. That will make all the difference, and it may not be too late for Spillett to make his claim even now."

"I am sure my father will back me up in the matter, whatever happens," said Dick; "and we must make John Spillett move in the case, if only for his daughter's sake."

"Certainly," replied the Colonel, becoming more convinced of John Spillett's chances. "But the Spilletts are my relations, and I think, Captain Huntingcroft, I am the person who ought to assist him."

Such an opportunity to confide to the Colonel his love affair, and his reasons for wishing to assist the Spilletts, was not to be resisted by the impulsive Dick Huntingcroft.

"But I have a reason, also, Colonel, for wishing to help them." And he proceeded to relate to the astonished old gentleman the story of his love for Jenny, and the consent his father had given to the marriage.

"And she has refused you after that!" said the Colonel. "Impossible! She is only playing with you and acting from a spirit of contradiction. She is just the girl for that. If we can restore her father, she cannot refuse you. I know women too well. You have only to persevere."

The Hon. Dick shook his head sadly.

"I fear, sir, you do not know her as well as I do. She is such a firm girl, nothing will turn her when she has once made up her mind."

"Firm! obstinate, you mean! I think it is great presumption on her part to refuse

such an offer!" continued the Colonel, with much energy. "That must be seen to." And he rashly formed a project in his mind, the result of which will be afterwards related.

"There is no necessity for you return to town immediately," he presently continued. "The lawyers will not hurry themselves, you may be certain."

The Hon. Dick was only too ready to be persuaded to prolong his visit a little, and the two friends went on smoking in silence.

"It is very extraordinary where my granddaughter can be," remarked the Colonel at length.

This roused the Hon. Dick to think of his friend's affair, and of his intention to see if anything could be done to move the Colonel, now that Sir John Wyldeman was dead.

"Very extraordinary," he replied, hiding a smile. "You know that Sir John is dead?"

"Yes," replied the Colonel; "but that makes no difference. I am more determined against the marriage than ever!"

"You must pardon me, Colonel, but I think it does."

"How so?" he said, turning sharply upon him.

"Well, sir, the man you object to is dead, and it appears to me hardly fair——"

"Captain Huntingcroft," broke in the Colonel hotly, "you must allow me to be the best judge of that. I object to the whole family and their principles in every way. My family shall never be allied to the Wyldemans with my consent. Besides," he continued, quieting down a little, "the girl is only eighteen, and I dislike early

marriages. As I said before, I wish her to see the world a little closer and judge for herself. She is as ignorant of life as a baby; she only sees things at present through her girlish imagination. If I could only find her, I should take her abroad directly." He stood up and refilled his pipe with a sad and thoughtful expression.

The Hon. Dick knew from experience that it was useless to press the matter any further at present, and he quickly turned the conversation.

His curiosity to know exactly where Mary was concealed had been much excited since his arrival in the old house, notwithstanding the pressure of his own affairs; and he now proceeded somewhat incautiously to remark on the house and its secret hiding-places.

Although this was a subject on which

the Colonel was rarely very communicative, yet, as his young friend had received his snubbing with a good grace, and was disposed to let the question of Mary drop, he graciously entered into the peculiar construction of the house; he even described the library, and the room above, with its masked window, on the roof.

The Hon. Dick was greatly interested, and guessed at once that Mary was there.

"You shall see them, if you like," said the Colonel, in a remarkable fit of condescension.

"Oh, you are very kind, Colonel!" replied Dick, much alarmed; "but I should be giving you too much trouble. Some future day—when you are going up there yourself."

"Not at all," said the Colonel. "I have to go into the library to-morrow, and I intended to go up to the rooms above, for

when I was in the library the other day, I thought I heard a noise overhead like the banging of a window. That heavy gale we had a short time ago, I expect, has blown one of the casements open. I will take you up there to-morrow morning the first thing after breakfast."

The Colonel was always ready for immediate action.

Dick grew white with anxiety. Mary would be discovered, and, worst of all, she and Jenny would think he had betrayed their secret.

"Very good," he replied faintly; and as the Colonel stood up to relight his pipe, which was perpetually going out, he thought intently on what he should do. The Colonel would certainly visit the secret rooms now he had got the idea into his head, even if he went alone. He

must make a desperate effort to communicate with Jenny and warn her at once.

After a little further conversation, the two gentlemen retired to the drawing-room.

Before they went in to prayers, Dick went to a side table and wrote a hasty note to Jenny, trusting to find a chance of giving it to her. But, alas! the perverse young housekeeper did not appear at this state gathering.

During the brief time that he was on his knees, he settled his plan of action. He thought it too dangerous to send her the note by another servant. It might also lead to gossip, and be compromising to her. He decided that when the rest were gone to bed, he would go to the door of her room—as he had a tolerably clear notion of its whereabouts—and warn her of the Colonel's intention.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MIDNIGHT ADVENTURES OF THE HON. DICK.

As soon as the house was quiet, Dick stole out of his room with a lighted candle and listened. Everything was so still, he could hear the clocks ticking in the hall below (he occupied the Quixote room), and a dog howling in the far-off stables.

He had put on his slippers, and he now made softly for the passage leading to the Children's Garden. The oak door at the top of the stairs creaked horribly as he opened it, and he glanced up at the picture

of the maiden, half expecting her to come down out of her frame.

On arriving at the door of Mary's sitting-room, he knocked gently several times, but receiving no answer, he entered. There was no one there excepting Solomon, fast asleep in his cage, resting on one leg. He then knocked several times at the door of Mary's bedroom, but again receiving no answer, he peeped in. There was no one there either, and he entered that also. Once more he knocked at the door leading into Jenny's bedroom, and still he could get no reply. After a little hesitation, he opened it gently a little way and called Jenny by name. Receiving no answer, he went a little way into the room. Yes, that was his dear girl's room, and he saw several of her well-known dresses hanging up. He glanced at the bed timidly, fearing

to profane his divinity; but that had evidently not been occupied. He then discreetly retired, thinking in his heart how he loved her, and, returning to Mary's sitting-room, he paused for a moment to consider what he should do. Jenny, then, must be sleeping with Mary in the secret rooms. How could he possibly get at her? The Colonel had told him the way to the Priest's rooms was through the library, perhaps he might find it.

On arriving at the library door, he found it securely locked. He began to be in despair, when suddenly he remembered the stairs to the roof, which Mary had pointed out to him several times as sacred to her grandfather. He decided he would go on the roof, and endeavour to find the window mentioned by the Colonel. He knew the Priest's rooms were immediately

over the library, and he tried to form a plan of the house in his head.

He now went to the door on the east stairs that has been before mentioned, and finding it unlocked, he mounted to the clock tower. Placing his light in a secure position, he stepped boldly down on to the roof, and proceeded to explore.

It was a clear starlight night, and he could just distinguish objects. The position of the clock tower, which he could distinctly see against the bright stars, served in some measure as a guide to him. He moved cautiously forward a little distance until he came to some flat leads. These terminated in a huge stack of chimneys. He decided from his position that the window he was in quest of must be somewhere on the other side of the chimneys. He crept round them, and found himself

on the edge of a roof, with a dark blank space beneath him. On glancing along the edge, he caught sight of a small gleam of light at about a dozen yards' distance on his left, and in a retired out of the way corner. He could just see the outline of a gable window above the speck of light. "That must be the window!" he thought. "But how was he to get to it?"

The only way that he could discover was to pass along the narrow stone coping at the edge of the roof—a dangerous experiment to an unpractised hand in the dark.

The Hon. Dick was well-known to his friends to be as brave as a Turk, but this was a danger that had the terror of darkness and the unknown. He stooped down and examined the edge of the roof and the coping with his hand. The roof was

very steep, and between it and the stone coping, there was a narrow gutter into which the tiles projected in an irregular manner, but they came so close to the stonework, and were so unequal, he thought it would be more dangerous to attempt to pass there than along the coping itself. The window was too far off for him to attract the attention of Mary and Jenny, by calling out, without danger of alarming the house. He searched in the gutter to see if he could find any loose stones which he might throw; he could not find one. He felt in his pocket, but there was nothing there but his cigar-case. He then decided he would throw that. He took good aim, but it only hit the gable, and bounding off, he heard it fall with a sharp thud on the ground a long way beneath his feet. To reach the window he was deter-

mined; and collecting his presence of mind, he fixed his eyes steadily on the spark of light directly in front of him, and walked swiftly along the coping until he reached another roof. This projected at right angles from the one he had skirted. He now found himself able to get to the window he sought without difficulty.

He put his ear to the window, and distinctly heard soft voices, and even laughter within. Then he heard a sudden exclamation and a laugh in the well-known clear tones of Jenny, and he knew that he had found them.

Tapping gently at the window, he waited a few moments. There was a dead silence as the Great Bear caught his eye. Then he tapped again more decidedly. Some one came behind the shutter and called out in an alarmed voice, "Who's there?"

"Open the window, Jenny," he said softly. "It is I, Captain Huntingcroft; I have something most important to tell you and Miss Doddingstead."

Jenny at once recognized her lover's voice. Undoing the shutter, she then opened the window. Mary was standing close behind her, in her dressing-gown.

"I have come to tell you," he said, "that you are in great danger of being discovered. The Colonel insists on bringing me up here to-morrow morning early to show me the secret rooms. He heard some window banging when he was in the room below, and he is coming up here to see what is the matter. It is most fortunate I have found you!"

Mary turned very pale, and looked as if she would faint; but Jenny's courage rose with the danger.

"Never mind, Miss Mary!" she cried; "we will be ready for him. We must move everything out into the passage, and you must hide there until he is gone. There is plenty of time."

Poor Mary looked a little reassured.

"But he will find out we have been here, Jenny. What shall we do?" she said.

"Indeed, Miss Mary, he shall not! He isn't half sharp enough. I can make everything look as it was before. He will never find out. It is only a matter of a little work."

"It was very kind of you to come, Captain Huntingcroft," said Mary. "But how did you manage to get here?"

"I came along the edge of the roof."

Jenny now turned pale.

"How could you do such a thing in the

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dark!" exclaimed Mary; "you might have fallen and killed yourself!"

"Oh, it is nothing," replied Dick; "any one could walk along there."

"But you really must not go back that way again," declared Mary, who well knew the danger of the place he had passed over; and she glanced at Jenny. "You must come in through the window, and we can take you back the other way."

"Oh, now I have done it once, I can easily do it again," said Dick.

But Mary would not hear of it, and Jenny gave her a look of assent.

"You would frighten us to death, Captain Huntingcroft! Indeed, you must come in here and pass this way."

The Hon. Dick, receiving this warm encouragement, was by no means unwilling

to avail himself of such a chance of prolonging his interview with Jenny.

After a hasty little bustle inside, they placed a chair, and he stepped into the room. Dick shook hands cordially with Mary.

"How clever of you to hide up here!" he said.

"But you are as cold as ice, Captain Huntingcroft!" exclaimed Mary; "and you have nothing on!"

Dick, in the ardour of his project, had gone on the roof just as he was in his thin evening dress, and the night was cold, and there was a sharp frost.

Mary glanced at Jenny.

"You must come and warm yourself by the fire a minute; you look quite frozen," she said.

The Hon. Dick allowed himself to be placed in a chair by the good fire which

was still burning brightly, and Mary took a seat near him.

"But how did you know I was up here?" she said, with the colour mounting to her face.

Jenny was busy closing the shutters.

Dick hesitated a moment with Mary's truthful eyes fixed upon him.

"Wyldeman told me on his way to see his father. You know Sir John is dead?"

"No!" said Mary; "we have heard nothing of it."

"But the Colonel knows," continued Dick; "you have only to hold out, and he must give in now."

"Poor grandpapa! I have behaved very wickedly to him. But I could not bear the idea of being taken abroad for a long time."

"I think you have done quite right.

The Colonel is most unjust. He is absurd! It is nothing but obstinacy, I believe."

"How is he?" said Mary presently.

"Who, Miss Doddingstead?"

"Grandpapa," said Mary, with the colour again mounting to her face.

"Oh, much the same as usual. You need not vex yourself on his account. He is as tough as nails! Frank Wyldeman also looked very well when I saw him," he added slily. "He swears he will never give you up, and he is just the fellow to stick to what he says."

Mary was comforted by these particulars, and a shy, beautiful smile came into her face as she arranged her pink dressing-gown.

"What a lovely creature she is," thought the too susceptible Dick. "How do you manage to pass your time up here?" he said presently.

"Jenny is very good to me," she replied gently.

"What a wonderful old place!" remarked Dick, looking round. "It is awfully jolly hiding here. It is like Robinson Crusoe. You should have your parrot!"

Jenny, who had disappeared with a light behind the rug, now came back again.

"We must set to work at once, Miss Mary, and get it done to-night." And she glanced at Dick to see if he was properly warmed.

He started up, and said, "Can I help you in any way?"

"No, thank you, sir," replied Jenny, with a shade of dryness in her tone. "We can manage very well by ourselves." And poor Dick understood he was expected to go.

"Then I had better leave you," he said. "But how am I to go?"

"Jenny will show you the way," said Mary, with a little look of her old mischief.

Her maid glanced at her and prepared to obey. Dick's thoughtful and heroic conduct had made a decided impression, and her stern resolve was beginning to melt a little—which was quickly observed by the keen perceptions of Mary.

He then said good night to our heroine, urging her never to lose courage, and saying that he would write to her soon through Jenny, to let her know how matters were going on. Then he suddenly exclaimed. "But I have left my light burning in the clock tower!"

Jenny hesitated an instant, and glanced at Mary. "Wait here, sir, for a moment, and I will go and fetch it for you," she said, and disappeared behind the rug.

Such an opportunity for another con-

fidence was not to be resisted by the Hon. Dick.

"Oh, Miss Doddingstead, I must tell you something. I am desperately in love with that girl, and I have offered to marry her, and she has refused me. *Do* you think I have any chance with her?"

Mary smiled. "I did not think so, but I do now—that you have a *little*."

"Did you know?" he continued eagerly.

"Yes, I made her tell me all about it. But you must not press her too hard. She is dreadfully obstinate."

"What do you advise me to do?"

"You must be very sad, and put on a black tie," she said, with a spice of her old fun. "But," she added seriously, "I am quite your friend, and I will help you all I can. She is the truest and most honest girl in the whole world, if you can only win her."

"Oh, thank you!" he said warmly. "I have told my father, and he has given his consent."

"That makes a great difference; and if John Spillett can really get back the property—— Hush!" said Mary.

Jenny now reappeared with Dick's candle, which she gravely handed to him. He said good night once more to Mary, and followed Jenny into the passage.

As they went along, Dick began to express his wonder, but his guide with great promptitude silenced him, and he followed her without a word. When they reached Mary's little hall, again he could not resist an exclamation of astonishment, but Jenny turned towards him quickly, and put her finger on her lips.

On arriving at the door of the east stairs, Dick longed to take her in his arms, but

he thought it would be seizing an unfair advantage, and he restrained himself. She opened the door for him to pass through, and, before he had time to look round, she had closed it again and disappeared.

As soon as Jenny had returned, the two young women set to work to carry out everything which they had brought up from below into the secret passage leading to the Children's Garden.

Mary feared that her grandfather would certainly discover that the place had been occupied, from the great difference in its cleanliness. Jenny thought they had not much to fear from that. The Colonel was not observant enough in these matters. A woman might see the place had been cleaned, but the Colonel was the last person in the world to notice it. The only thing she was really afraid of was the fireplace ;

but she trusted to her ingenuity to hide the recent use of that also.

"What I most fear, after all, Miss Mary, is that you will be perished with cold sitting in that passage."

Mary said she would put on her fur cloak, and it was settled Jenny should get it out for her.

They were not long in clearing out their own effects, and then Jenny set to work at the fireplace. The difficulty was to know what to do with the burning coals. Mary thought it would not be safe to throw water on the grate, it might not get dry in time. Jenny thought the contrary. "It might be rain that had come down the chimney." Mary said there would be time to clear the grate in the morning. Jenny declared she should never sleep until all was right. Finally, they got the burning

ashes out, and Jenny sprinkled some red tooth-powder, mingled with cinder-dust, over the ironwork.

"I think that looks old and rusty enough for anything, now, Miss Mary," she said with great glee.

This young woman was in her element where there was danger and impromptu action. She would have made a famous admiral if she had been a man!

They now placed the furniture belonging to the room as nearly as possible in the position in which they had found it, and dragged the bed into its old place in front of the opening to the passage.

Jenny thought, as the Colonel had heard a noise like a window slamming, they had better leave the one in the large room open to "throw him off the scent." It would also "cool the room down again." But

"it didn't much matter; he never noticed anything very closely—unless it was the inside of a clock!"

Having then opened the window and the shutters, they crept through the lining at the back of the bed, and went down to Jenny's room as usual for the night.

Mary was sad in thinking of the subterfuges she was forced into enacting, and to which she was only partially reconciled; but Jenny was in high spirits at the thought of outwitting the old Colonel, and from a growing feeling that she might yet bring herself to reward her lover for his gallantry and devotion.

CHAPTER V.

THE TORTOISE-SHELL COMB.

"Is that your cigar-case, Huntingcroft?" said the Colonel, as he came into the dining-room the next morning before prayers, and found the Hon. Dick standing with his back to the fire. "I picked it up in the garden this morning."

"Yes," said Dick, getting very red in the face. "I suppose I must have dropped it."

"I was not quite certain," said the Colonel, "because I thought I saw you with it in your hand last evening."

At this moment the servants marched

in to prayers, with Jenny at their head. She had a bright spot on her cheeks, but otherwise looked as calm and fresh as if she had lately risen from a long night of peaceful slumber.

After breakfast the Colonel, ever impatient to carry out any new project, said, "I shall be quite ready to go up to the library when you are."

Dick was anxious to give his friends upstairs as much time as possible.

"I will just have a cigar, Colonel, if you don't mind, and then I shall be at your service."

"Very good—say in half an hour, then."

Dick assented, and went out into the garden in front of the house. He considered for a moment whether he should go on the roof again and try to give them warning that the Colonel was coming

shortly, but he had such confidence in Jenny's promptitude and skill, that he decided it would be better to let matters alone. He then lighted his cigar, and strolled round to survey the scene of his midnight adventures. The window of the secret rooms had been so artfully placed that nothing was to be seen of it from the garden below. He was rather startled, however, to find what a narrow place he had passed over in the dark, and that if he had fallen he would probably have been impaled on a row of sharp flower-stakes, which were planted in a bed underneath.

At the appointed time he joined the Colonel, and they proceeded to the library.

Dick was so silent from anxiety, that the Colonel was a little disappointed at the apparent want of interest he showed in the strange old place.

"I will surprise him yet, though," thought the Colonel, and he promptly seized the mantelpiece and made it descend into the floor.

Immediately a huge rat bolted out of the cavity above, and disappeared across the floor. They tried to find it, but were unsuccessful.

"The confounded brutes!" cried the Colonel. "I thought I had got rid of them! I expect now we shall find a whole colony upstairs."

Dick caught the idea.

"That will account for the noises you heard up there, Colonel."

"Very likely," he replied. "But I am sure I heard a window bang also."

When the Colonel had finished his long history of this famous retreat, the length of which Dick encouraged—making loud

exclamations of wonder and astonishment, that his voice might be heard in the rooms above—they proceeded to open the secret door leading to the Priest's rooms.

Again Dick's voice rose to the loudest wonder, and the Colonel, who at first was a little damped by his want of appreciation, now became excited also, and as they opened the inner door and proceeded to mount the stairs, they made such a clatter between them that there was little fear of the enemy not being warned in time. Indeed, Mary and Jenny, who were anxiously waiting concealed in the passage behind the bed, heard such a noise, that they thought their champion must have been getting up a sham quarrel with the Colonel to prevent his coming up; which proceeding Jenny thought very unnecessary, as she keenly enjoyed the danger,

and would have been much disappointed if the Colonel had not come, after all her trouble. But poor Mary trembled with cold and fear, and shame was in her heart.

"Here we are," said the Colonel with some pride, throwing open the door at the top of the stairs which led into the famous rooms.

Dick wondered aloud at the rooms, as if he had never seen them before—in truth, he was much astonished at the transformation which had taken place—and plied the Colonel briskly with questions to call off his close attention.

The Colonel nevertheless looked about him. "I thought so," he said, as he went to the open window. "I must send some one up here to see to the fastenings."

Dick also went to the window and then closed it.

"The fastening is all right, Colonel," he said, as he secured the window and gave it a shake.

The Colonel put on his glasses and examined the hasp. "No," he said, "there is nothing wrong with that. How very odd, surely! The window was properly fastened the last time I was up here."

"What are those rooms in there?" said Dick, calling off his attention.

The Colonel then took him into the little chapel, expatiating at length on the number of historical personages who were supposed to have said Mass there.

When they returned to the principal room, the Colonel said, "It is astonishing how warm it is up here. But that only shows how solidly the rooms are built, and how well those priest fellows knew how to take care of themselves. There has

not been a fire lighted here for much more than a hundred years"—glancing at the grate—"and yet, see how warm and comfortable the room feels. I would also have you remark that there is hardly any dust about—that shows there are no draughts."

The Hon. Dick was obliged to turn his head to conceal a smile.

"There is another secret passage out of this room, that goes down to one of the gardens," said the Colonel. "I remember hearing my grandfather say it is concealed behind that bed, but I have never searched for it—suppose we pull the bed out and look?" he said, with a sudden impulse, incited by Dick's exaggerated enthusiasm; and he walked towards the bed.

His companion was in an agony, and

knew not how to prevent his carrying out his project.

"There is another rat!" cried the Colonel, as he saw a long dark object on the floor close under the bed. But the rat did not move, and the Colonel stooped to examine it. "What can this be?" he exclaimed, as he picked up a long tortoise-shell comb, and carried it towards the light. "Why, it belongs to Mary!" he exclaimed, as he put on his glasses and saw her monogram engraved upon it. "How could it possibly have got here?"

"Perhaps the rats," said Dick in despair.

"Not unlikely," replied the Colonel; "they are great thieves. A rat once carried off my shaving brush. When Harrison comes back I must have this whole place ferreted out. I think I shall send him orders to return home at once.

He has utterly failed to find Mary, and I shall have to go myself after all." He sighed heavily as he thought of his trouble about her, and, forgetting his intention of looking for the secret passage, he put the comb in his breast pocket, and proposed they should return to the library.

As soon as they were gone, Jenny popped her fair head through the lining at the back of the bed—her eyes shining like diamonds. When the voices had ceased below, and they heard the outer library door close, the two young women crept out of their hiding-place, and before long had again re-established themselves in the Priest's rooms.

The fortune-telling section of the believers in palmistry may certainly here plume themselves on the truth of a rule laid down in the most ancient books on

this subject, with regard to the double line of life, which we have seen Jenny Spillett had in both her hands—its best form of manifestation. It is this. Those persons who have the double line of life in both hands may engage in any hazardous enterprise, such as a commander going into battle, for instance, with safety and certainty of success.

Now, if Jenny had not left Mary's comb by a happy oversight on the bed, from whence it fell to the floor as the two young women crept over it to escape behind, the Colonel, in all probability, would have discovered them.

The rational explanation, however, of the good fortune of the double line of life, from the character-reading point of view, is that it indicates, amongst other qualities, the highest degree of energy and self-

reliance. Add to this the especial faculty of rising to circumstances, and of overcoming difficulties, in proportion to the talent of its possessor. It cannot be denied, nevertheless, that it was a very fortunate circumstance for her, that Jenny Spillett let Mary's comb fall on the bed. But the reader must not necessarily conclude she will defeat the Colonel in the end, as he also had the rare double line of life, and an obstinacy and determination equal to her own; and, moreover, he was the real master of the situation.

The Hon. Dick returned to town again that evening, taking with him John Spillett's box of papers. He, however, made an engagement with the Colonel to come down again shortly for a few days' hunting; in the mean time he would send down a couple of horses to the Little Sack.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLONEL THREATENS TO BOX HIS HOUSEKEEPER'S EARS.

The morning after the departure of the Hon. Dick, the Colonel sat in his room, thinking of his young friend's doleful face as he drove off.

"That must be put a stop to," he said to himself; "the girl is not treating him with proper respect to keep him dangling about like this. Of course she means to marry him in the end." Presently he started up and rang his bell. "Ask Mrs. Spillett to come and see me a moment," he said, when John came to the door.

Before long, with some wondering at this unusual summons, Jenny appeared.

"Come in and shut the door," he said.

She stood before him with a look of quiet resolution, prepared to combat what Harrison called "one of the Colonel's contraries." She seemed so calm and self-possessed, he found some difficulty in knowing how to begin the attack. A suspicion also now crossed his mind that his proceeding was somewhat irregular, and that it was a very delicate matter to deal with. All the same, he would do his duty to her and her father, and his friend Huntingcroft, and not let her lose such a splendid offer for some romantic nonsense or silly caprice; and he plunged at once into the matter.

"Why do you persist in refusing Captain Huntingcroft?"

Jenny's face became crimson, and she was taken quite aback. The Colonel thought he had a culprit before him, and that he should soon bring her to a sense of her foolish conduct.

"Are you aware of the great honour he is paying you, and that an offer like that is not to be treated with girlish levity?" he asked a little sternly.

"With all respect to you, sir, I think that is a matter for me to decide," she answered firmly, her heart again hardened against her lover by this interference.

"Yes; but not to keep him dangling about like this. Do you quite appreciate the high position he will occupy some day?"

"I have not kept him dangling about, sir; and I trust I quite appreciate his position in life," she answered with irritating calmness.

"Then what do you mean by treating him like a swain at a fair?"

"I have not treated him like a swain at a fair, sir."

"Don't go on contradicting me like that!"

"I am not contradicting you, sir; I am only speaking the truth."

"But I say that you are, at every word."

"But I am not, sir"—obstinacy rousing obstinacy.

"You are an impertinent young minx, and forgetting yourself altogether!"

"No, sir; I am not an impertinent young minx, and *I* am not forgetting myself," she said, her anger rising as fast as the Colonel's, but kept more under command, and expressed only by a quiet tone and emphasis that was the more irritating.

"Leave the room directly, or I will box your ears!"

The Colonel was furious at "such a young minx" standing up against him, Colonel Doddingstead, like this.

"No, sir; I am sure you will not forget yourself to do anything so unbecoming; and you will allow me to say, sir, that I think you have got a wrong notion of the matter. I am quite sensible of the honour that has been done me, and of your goodness in thinking me in any way worthy of it; but I never mean to marry any one, and a woman, sir, is not forced to marry, unless she wishes."

"But what possible reason can you have for not marrying Captain Huntingcroft?—a more amiable man never lived," said the Colonel, quieting down a little, as the sense of a woman's perfect right to refuse marriage came upon him with more force than ever after Mary's escapade.

"I have my own reasons, sir, for not wishing to marry, which I will not trouble you with. And if you think that I have been impertinent to you, I am very sorry; as I had no wish to be so, and I am sure you meant to be kind, sir, as you have always been to poor father and me—and I thank you all the same." Tears sprang into her eyes as she spoke.

"Well, well, Jenny, a wilful woman must have her own way; but do not throw overboard such a fine chance from mere perversity,—that is all I have to say, my good girl."

Jenny gave him a gracious little curtsy, with a half-sad smile, and departed master of the field.

"What an extraordinary girl she is!" exclaimed the Colonel to himself; "but what can be her reason? Could she have

known anything against him when she knew him in London? But Huntingcroft is a straight enough fellow on the whole, I am certain—particularly for an only son. Women are queer cattle, that is the fact; and there is no accounting for them in any way. But he must persevere; she will never be able to refuse him in the end." And the Colonel turned to his table to go on answering his letters.

Jenny was not at all pleased with her lover for making a confidant of the Colonel. She considered this as only another proof of the impulsiveness of his character, and his want of self-command. She also highly disapproved of his ready disposition to make confidences, as one of those dangerous weaknesses in a man which lays him open to the designs and influence of others—particularly of artful women; and which

she dreaded—more than ever now—would make a husband not to be depended on, however amiable he might be. And, as she sat hastily stitching in her room, she decided absolutely and for ever that she would never marry him, even if it should break her heart to give him up,—as no misery was equal to that of a slighted wife who loves her husband truly.

CHAPTER VII.

UGLY BOB.

Harrison returned shortly to Whitepatch, with a small library of the most recent English and American publications on homœopathy, and enough new medicine to doctor the city of Manchester, much recovered by his long and interesting holiday from the blow he had sustained in the loss of his wife, offering a tempting prize to be plucked from widowhood by one or other of the two ladies of the housekeeper's room—both of whom were awaiting his return with deep feminine resolves affecting his liberty.

He and the Colonel then had a long conversation on the subject of Mary's retreat, which on one side was an ingenious determination to throw dust in the Colonel's eyes and keep him quiet; and on the other, a vain beating about the bush, which resulted only in greater perplexity.

Harrison ended in persuading his master that Mary was certainly not in one of the religious institutions, and the Colonel was at his wits' ends to know in what direction to look for her, or what to do further in the matter. He could only comfort himself with his confidence in her promise, that she would not marry without his consent.

Harrison also made a courageous, though cautious attempt, to induce the Colonel to give his consent to the marriage, but he soon found it was hopeless, and that the

old gentleman was more entrenched than ever in his determination to refuse it.

The conscience of this otherwise faithful servant was, however, becoming in the end much troubled, as Miss Mary could not go on for ever hiding in the Priest's rooms; and he felt that the responsibility of keeping her there was beginning to rest largely upon himself. He regretted that he had ever allowed himself to be drawn into the plot, as he felt that his first duty was doubtless to his good old master,—when an event occurred at Whitepatch which brought the chief persons in our story something else to divert their thoughts and energies, and ending in a new development of our heroine's affairs.

The Hon. Dick had sent down his horses to the Little Sack, and arrived himself in a few days at the Manor. He

had also written to Mary, under cover to Jenny, entreating her to arrange another interview for him with her maid. He also stated that his lawyers were certain they could recover John Spillett's property, as the Levys were unable to produce any deed cutting off the entail; that Heavy and Young had already made a claim on John Spillett's behalf, and that they had little doubt they should be able to effect a compromise in the claimant's favour, as the Levys made only a lame pretence of allowing the matter to go into court.

But Jenny remained obdurate, and posted with her own hands, under cover of an envelope directed by herself, a letter from Mary to Dick refusing an interview on her behalf, and giving him little or no hope. This letter, however, did not prevent his coming to Whitepatch. He

was growing desperate, and did not much care what he did. Neither could he resist the temptation of being in the same house with Jenny, and getting the poor consolation of seeing her sometimes at prayers.

Dick had sent down a horse called Ugly Bob, a fast and powerful animal, a showy mount, but a nervous brute in the field, that his friends had entreated him to get rid of, as too dangerous to ride to hounds.

On the morning after his arrival, there was a meet near Whitepatch, to which Dick intended to go. He determined to start on Ugly Bob, having his other horse sent on.

A few hours after he had gone there was a commotion at the front door, and Harrison rushed in with his face a shade paler than usual, and whispered something

to the Colonel in the dining-room, who immediately followed him out into the hall.

Stretched on a feather-bed in a cart at the door they saw the Hon. Dick lying insensible, and with his head severely wounded. Mr. Bramble and another gentleman were with him. Harrison quickly found a small couch, and he was carried up upon it to his bedroom. Mr. Bramble had already sent a messenger for Mr. White, the local doctor, who shortly arrived. Mr. White feared there was severe injury both to the brain and spine; and said that it was a wonder he was alive, and that his family had better be sent for at once, and Sir George Goodman summoned from town. Telegrams accordingly were immediately sent to Lord Huntingcroft, and the great Sir George.

Mr. Bramble gave the Colonel an account of the accident.

"Huntingcroft had ridden wildly at everything he came to, exactly as if he were riding for a fall, and that brute of a horse of his also had become so excited he seemed to have no control over him. When they got to the bottom of a field, near the end of the run, the huntsman had shouted to them to keep well to the right, but Huntingcroft had gone straight on; and that mad brute carried him clean over a hedge into an old chalk pit on the other side. The horse was killed clean on the spot, and they found his rider shot to the ground several yards ahead of him, quite unconscious, and with the blood running from his head."

The news spread through the house as only disaster can fly, and Jenny came run-

ning up to Mary with suppressed terror in her face.

Mary, when she heard the account, understood the matter at once; but the sight of Jenny's distress prevented her from saying all she felt with the severity she thought her friend deserved.

"Oh, Jenny! what have you done?" she said; "I fear he did it on purpose."

"For God's sake, Miss Mary, don't say that!"—her tears breaking out in floods. "I only did what I thought was best." She bent for a moment with her face in her hands, and leant against the wall. Then by a rigorous effort of her firm nature she recovered her self-command.

What will not the eyes of a true woman express when the object of her affections is in supreme danger? To judge by the expression in her face, Jenny at that

moment would have willingly died to save her lover.

"Tell me, dear Miss Mary, can't I go and see him? I may be of use. I will be quite calm; men are so stupid and frightened when anything happens they are not used to."

"But Mr. White has come, Jenny, and you must not disturb him."

"But I can go in as housekeeper to see if he wants anything!"

"Yes, you might do that," said Mary; and Jenny started for her lover's room.

She found that she was just in time, as Mr. White was requiring many little things before he could examine and dress the wound on the head. Harrison had already gone to despatch a man on horseback for leeches, and to prepare mustard poultices for the feet. As she ran off to get them,

her lover's pale and blood-stained face, of which she had a brief glimpse, haunted her like a dreadful dream, and it was only the necessity of action and the importance of her mission that prevented her from sinking to the ground.

When she returned, Mr. White was again quietly examining his patient, to assure himself that no bones were broken. He thought it was a case of compression of the brain, probably complicated with concussion of the spine. He now cut away the hair, and examined the wound on the head more carefully. He looked very grave, and said he feared the bone of the skull was pressing on the brain. Poor Dick was breathing with great labour, and they could not rouse him nor get an answer.

Although Jenny managed to save every morsel of the hair that was cut off, she

attended to the business in hand, and Mr. White was well pleased with her promptitude and presence of mind.

Mr. Bramble had gone to send the telegrams, and the Colonel stood by the bedside to help in anything that was required.

Mr. White remained with him until late in the evening, and towards ten o'clock Sir George Goodman arrived. He confirmed Mr. White's opinion of the case, and approved of his treatment, and said there was little more to be done except to keep his head constantly covered with wet cloths, and on no account to give him stimulants. He thought there was not much hope, and that even if life were spared, he would probably remain helpless on his back for life. Sir George agreed to remain for the night, and, when he went to bed—leaving Mr.

White in charge—there was no improvement in the symptoms.

The Colonel sat up the greater part of the night with his friend, and insisted on Mr. White getting a little rest; promising to call him if he saw any change. Mary and Jenny retired very late to rest—and this time it was Jenny who at length sobbed herself to sleep in Mary's arms; and Mary lay awake for a long time, watching over her heart-broken friend, and listening to Don Carlos, who seemed to have a more dismal voice than ever.

CHAPTER VIII.

JENNY DARES TO DISBELIEVE IN THE GREAT SIR GEORGE GOODMAN.

JENNY awoke at a very early hour with a feeling of suffocation, and she immediately disengaged herself from Mary's arms, and got out of bed. As soon as she had made herself a little presentable, she stole off to the door of her lover's room and listened. All seemed quiet, and she thought she could hear him breathing in the same way as he had done the night before, and some one gently moving about. She remained some time, and then returned to her room and lay down outside the bed. When half-

past five struck, she again rose softly and went to call Ruth, sending her down to light the fire and get some tea ready.

Before long she appeared at the door of the sick-room with a little tea-tray in her hand. She knocked gently, and Mr. White came to the door, looking very grave.

"How is he, sir?" she whispered.

"I fear just the same," he replied in the same tone.

"I have brought you some tea, sir."

"Well, I should be glad of a little," he said, as he allowed her to pass into the room.

She placed the tea down on a little table near where he had been sitting, and stole softly to the bedside. Dick was still breathing with labour, but he was already much changed, and the paleness of death was on his face. As she stood with her hands clasped, gazing at him intently,

Mr. White sat down with his back towards the bed to drink his tea. Jenny stooped and pressed her trembling lips tenderly on the dying face.

Sir George visited his patient again before breakfast, but he was cautious in giving any further opinion. After breakfast he had a consultation with Mr. White, and departed to catch the express, leaving the case in his hands. But before he left he wanted to telegraph for a professional nurse from town. The Colonel thought that no one could nurse him so well as Jenny.

Mr. White approved, and she was installed in that office, in which she was to be assisted by one of the gardener's wives, who had had experience in such matters.

The Colonel had been wondering that

they heard nothing of Lord Huntingcroft; but a telegram arrived early, stating that he had been away from home, and would be down by a train at midday.

During the morning Dick seemed to be slowly sinking, and Jenny became highly dissatisfied with Sir George's almost negative treatment. She thought he ought not to have left so soon, and that he had virtually come down for nothing. She then went to Harrison, and demanded fiercely if none "of his little medicines were of any use—she didn't believe in those helpless old creatures."

Harrison said he knew perfectly what he ought to have, and that was arnica. "It had saved many a dying man in severe accidents."

"Then why didn't you say so before, Mr. Harrison?"

Harrison, with all his skill, was too modest to interpose his amateur knowledge in such a grave case, and when a great doctor had been called in; and he said that he had not liked to interfere.

"But I shall interfere," said Jenny, "and give it to him at once—if you will let me have some. You always say they can't do any harm; so there is no danger in trying."

"Well, you may if you like; but you must not let Mr. White see you do it, or he will prevent you."

Harrison fetched a bottle of tincture of arnica, and some globules of the same, and instructed Jenny how they were to be used. The tincture was to be put into the wet bandages for the head, and the globules were to be beaten up for some time in a little water, and a teaspoonful

given to him every half hour. He said if they had used the arnica at once, he would very likely have been conscious again before now.

"Then you are quite *wicked* not to have told me of it before!" said Jenny with much warmth. "And if he does not recover, I shall never forgive you!" And she departed in haste with her precious medicine.

She was much too skilful not to soon find an opportunity of administering her remedies, and Mr. White had to leave his patient at intervals to attend upon a poor woman in danger.

Early in the afternoon Lord Huntingcroft arrived. The Hon. Dick had one sister, who had married the Earl of Walsall; but she was at Mentone, in very delicate health, and her father had hesitated about

sending for her until he saw how things were likely to turn. He had long anticipated an accident of this kind, as he knew Dick's rashness in the saddle; but his distress was none the less now that it had actually occurred.

He sat by his bedside for some time, and was not long in finding out who was the bright young creature who seemed to be nursing him with such remarkable devotion, and whose face was at once sympathetic to him. He thought what a spiteful and envious thing was fate to dash all his fondest wishes to the ground just as they were about to be realized.

Jenny also found time to make her observations, and thought she had never seen a kinder-looking old gentleman, and that she could have loved him as if she had been his own daughter.

Jenny went on with her arnica, and late in the evening Mr. White was rather surprised to find a sudden improvement in Dick's pulse and respiration (the use of the thermometer had not yet been generally appreciated), with greater warmth in the feet. Towards midnight consciousness seemed to be returning, and Mr. White was able to get a confused answer from him when he spoke in a loud tone—and he said he thought they might save his life yet. He then left him for a time to attend to his other patient, and Jenny and Lord Huntingcroft remained alone in the sick-room.

As the night advanced the consciousness increased, and Dick was able to complain of thirst. Jenny thought his pulse was becoming too quick and his hands very hot. Harrison had warned her to let him know

at once if there were any signs of feverishness. Without saying a word, she slipped off quietly and called Harrison out of his bed. He gave her aconite, with instructions to use it alternately with the arnica. If there were any signs of delirium, she was to let him know immediately. He would not trust even Jenny with the requisite medicines in advance, as he had never found any woman capable of applying the right one as the symptoms arose.

The Colonel came in once or twice in the night, as he was unable to sleep. In the early morning the pulse was greatly improved, the thirst less, the deadly fever-fire seemed to have been nearly quenched at its kindling, and the breathing and expression of the face was more natural. Lord Huntingcroft had remained the whole night in the room, and at an early

hour Harrison called him down for some breakfast he had prepared in the dining-room, at which also the Colonel appeared. They felt little of their fatigue and anxiety in their renewed hope.

Jenny remained alone in the room, nor would she allow any one to take her place. She was now standing quietly by the bed, and she again stooped and kissed Dick with the lightness of a butterfly. He opened his eyes and recognized her.

"Is that you, Jenny?" he said quietly. "Where am I?"

"You have had a bad accident, sir, and you are in your own bed; but you must keep very quiet and not talk."

She was radiant with joy at this rapid improvement and his return to life.

"Kiss me again, dear Jenny," he said presently.

She became crimson with confusion, but she had also an increased joy to find he was so really conscious. She again stooped, and putting her two hands lightly on each side of his bandaged head, she kissed him tenderly.

"Once more, Jenny," he said.

"You will promise to keep quiet, sir?"

"Yes," he said, and she again stooped and kissed him softly. He sighed a little, and a happy smile came on his face.

When Mr. White appeared, he was astonished at the rapid improvement in his patient, and that there was so little fever on his recovering consciousness. Jenny did not enlighten him. She feared there would be more blood sucking or some strong medicine that would undo everything. She was, however, very glad to hear his opinion that immediate danger

to life had passed, and that he would recover, if the spine was not injured. But she was confident Harrison would cure even that; and at length she went off with a lighter heart to eat something for almost the first time since the accident happened, and to give a little attention to Mary.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOVE SCENE AND A SHORT MEDICAL TREATISE.

We must now return for a little time to our unfortunate heroine upstairs. Being left almost entirely alone, her courage began to fail her. With such events going on in the house, she felt more keenly than ever her false position. Jenny, notwithstanding her anxiety about her lover, had taken care that she should not be neglected in essential matters; but she had neither time nor thought for one of her encouraging speeches. Mary only saw her for a few moments together, and the

hours passed very wearily as she found herself unable to give any real attention to her books or her usual occupations. Never before had her captivity pressed so heavily, and she began to think seriously of surrender, when Jenny arrived with the good news of Dick's improvement.

This cheered her up a little, as she had a very real regard and friendship for him. Jenny had also something else to talk about, which was not less cheering.

She had made up her mind now, that if Dick recovered she would accept him. Lord Huntingcroft had shown marked kindness and even distinction in his manner towards her, and she felt instinctively that she had already considerable influence with him. The Rector had failed in the end to move the Colonel; but she thought that Lord Huntingcroft, who

was quite as old a friend of the Colonel's, might succeed, if they could only get him on their side, and to enter cordially into the matter.

Mary knew that the Colonel had a great respect for Dick's father, and that a man in his position would have a greater weight with him than any one else; she approved of Jenny's scheme, and was much encouraged thereby.

"But you must make up your mind, then, to marry Captain Huntingcroft, Jenny," she said.

"Well, Miss Mary, I have made up my mind," she replied, with a bright blush.

"To marry him?"

"Yes—if he recovers."

"Then you must tell him so at once. It will be the best medicine you can give him."

"I shall see, Miss Mary, how he behaves."

When her maid was gone, our heroine felt much more hopeful, and tried to do a little work towards finishing her interior of the Priest's rooms, which was already a charming little picture. It is hanging up at Whitepatch to this day, and often gazed at by the old Colonel, who is still alive. But we must return again to the sick-room.

There were no fresh signs of fever or other complications, but Jenny was not long in perceiving that her patient was not so much recovered as she had thought, and that he was nearly helpless. Mr. White said it was only what he had feared. But he would not express any further opinion until Sir George came down again.

Jenny now became unaccountably shy, and was very angry with herself for so being; but she allowed the gardener's wife to take her place much oftener than poor Dick liked, and it was a hopeful sign that he had energy enough in his mind to swear at her inwardly as an officious nuisance. Jenny, however, kept the command in chief, and no sick-room was ever managed with greater skill and quiet thoughtfulness, or a firmer will and tact displayed in keeping away over-anxious visitors. Lord Huntingcroft, however, was so quiet and gentle, and his son seemed to take such a pleasure in seeing him, that he was a privileged person, and Dick instinctively felt that Jenny had gained his father's affections as well as his own. She had lovingly bent down and whispered, "that if he would do what he was told and get

well, she would marry him;" and he was happy and hopeful, notwithstanding his helpless condition.

But still there was no further improvement. Sir George came down again, and, at Lord Huntingcroft's earnest entreaties to know the exact truth, said he thought it was very doubtful how the case would turn, but there was some hope in his son's youth and good constitution. Mr. White sent various medicines, of which, however, Jenny took care that Dick should not have a single drop. She relied entirely on Harrison, and deep were her consultations with him. He held firmly to his opinion that arnica was the remedy and the only one, and that it was a matter of time and perseverance. He, however, was not sure about his dilution—that he was using the right one, or that the arnica ought not to

be alternated with some other medicine. Jenny became impatient, and insisted on studying the matter for herself in Harrison's books and reviews. At length, with great triumph, she came upon an article on the use of arnica in severe injuries, by a great American. In this article stress was laid on varying the dilutions in obstinate cases of spinal concussion, and on a great economy in the use of the medicine immediately there were any signs of improvement. Harrison at once thought he saw his way, and he telegraphed to town for a very low dilution, to use with those he had in hand.

The two ardent conspirator-disciples then set to work as before, under the very nose of Mr. White, who regarded homœopathy as the most abominable of quackeries.

Whether it was the skilful use of the

arnica or the mighty power of nature, the reader must judge for himself; but certainly, in a day or two only, a marked improvement was shown in the condition of the patient, and before long they were able to move him on to a sofa.

It was the hour of dinner, and the Colonel and his guest were downstairs, cheerful and happy at the turn affairs had taken. The sick man was on his sofa, and, kneeling on the ground at his side, with one arm thrown gently round him, and her head close to him, was a bright-looking girl with an abundance of fair hair and a happy, blushing face.

"You are sure you really love me?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"When did you first begin to care for me 'a little'?"

"I leave you to guess, sir.

"Why do you still persist in calling me sir? Why don't you call me Dick?"

"You must first get quite well, sir, and then perhaps, sir, in time, sir, I may learn to call you—Richard—to begin with, you know, sir."

"Mrs. Spillett, you are the greatest little prude that ever wore an apron with two pockets in it. You ought to be called Prudence. I think I shall call you Prudence."

"As you like, sir—only I won't be called Prue!"

"Why are women in the country so fond of aprons with two pockets, Prue?"

"I don't know, sir, unless it is because they think it is nicer to look clean and homely than smart."

"Ah, commend me to an artless country girl for knowing how to make herself look becoming!"

"Do you think aprons are becoming, sir?"

"You innocent lamb, of course you know they are, or you would not wear them! But it is extraordinary how many women don't understand that. If they knew how nice and womanly they look in them, they would wear them always.

"When they go to court, sir, or at a ball?"

"Well, no—well, yes—at a fancy ball. I remember once I was greatly taken—but that only shows what pretentious asses we have become in these days; no one can be simple now," said our hero number two, suddenly, to cover his retreat. But he was not to be let off so easily.

"Who was it you were so greatly taken with, sir?" said our heroine number two, with a sting of her old jealousy

and mistrust, drawing herself away a little.

"What a silly child you are! Come here, put your head here—quite close now, that I may tell you how I love you. When did you first begin to care for me? You have not answered me that yet."

"I always liked you a little, sir."

"A little! Look here, Prudence, if you don't tell me, I am sure I shall not sleep to-night," he said, with some of the imitation of a sick man. "I shall think you only care for me because I am ill."

This aroused his nurse to the danger of letting him talk too much or becoming excited.

"I liked you, sir, the instant I saw you —the first time we met."

"True? but why did you like me?

"I don't know, sir; perhaps it was

because I thought you were so nice and different from all the others."

"How different from the others, Minerva?"

"Because you did not seem to think you were doing me a great favour in talking to me. But I am not going to let you talk any more to-night, sir. You know Mr. White says you are to be kept very quiet."

"Well, then, one nice little kiss, and I will let you go."

Jenny kissed him gently, and then adroitly withdrew her blushing face, and proceeded to arrange matters for his going to bed again; nor would she allow her patient to say another word.

From which little scene it may be gathered that the Hon. Dick was on a fair way to recovery.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW ALLY.

JENNY was not long in taking her lover into her new plot. Dick entered into it heartily, though he had considerable doubt of his father being persuaded to interfere in a matter of such great delicacy.

Lord Huntingcroft had been informed of Jenny's acceptance of his son's hand. He had had many little conversations with her, and was more and more charmed with her beauty and her naturalness; neither did he fail to appreciate very quickly her good sense and spirit, and the honesty and firmness of her character. He was also con-

vinced that she had really given her heart to his son—a matter he set much store on.

It had been agreed between Jenny and her lover that they should open fire on Lord Huntingcroft together, and they took an early opportunity of doing so, when all three were quietly alone.

As Dick had expected, his father showed considerable reluctance to interfere in the Colonel's affairs, whom he thought would only resent it as an impertinence. The confederates debated the matter with him for some time in vain, but Dick had kept his friend's secret, and his father had not yet been informed of Mary's being in the house. At last Lord Huntingcroft said—

"But where can she possibly be? Surely the Colonel could find her if he took proper means!"

Dick hesitated, and glanced at Jenny.

She nodded her head. "She is there, father," he said, pointing gravely towards the ceiling.

Lord Huntingcroft was a little startled for a moment.

"What do you mean?" said his lordship.

"She is in the house at this moment, and concealed in the Priest's rooms over the library."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the old gentleman, highly diverted.

The joke was too good. It gave him a certain feeling of superiority over his simple old friend, and Jenny and Dick drew such a picture of the constancy and devotion of the lovers, and the injustice of their having been first thrown together and then torn asunder afterwards, that he consented to "mention the subject" to the

Colonel, and to use his influence on the lovers' behalf, "if he could find any legitimate opening that would warrant his interference."

"After dinner is the best time, father, when he has lighted his pipe."

Lord Huntingcroft was not much flattered at his diplomatic powers being made subject to the good effects of a pipe of tobacco; nevertheless, he good-humouredly promised that he would see what could be done that evening, when he and the Colonel were alone together, and Jenny flew up to Mary with the good news.

* * * * *

"Yes, it is very sad, Doddingstead," said his old comrade to the Colonel, as they sat over the fire that evening after dinner, puffing away with the gravity of elders. On a little table between them stood a

finished bottle of famous old Romanée, which came from a snug little warm cellar opening out of the Colonel's room.

The Colonel had never before mentioned to him the subject of Mary, which he had much wondered at, concluding, however, now, that it was to his advantage, as his friend must have had a guilty conscience in some way, or he certainly would have done so. It was with difficulty, and the exercise of much tact, that he had brought him to speak of his trouble even now.

"I suppose you have quite made up your mind against it?" he continued presently.

"Entirely!" said the Colonel. "Nothing shall ever induce me to connect my family with the Wyldemans."

This was not encouraging. But Lord Huntingcroft was not wanting in moral fibre; and even from the Colonel's own

account of the matter, he thought he was acting with unwise obstinacy when things had gone so far.

"I have not had the pleasure of seeing your granddaughter since she was a child," he said. "Is she a girl who will get over a disappointment easily?"

This was a home thrust.

"Well—I am afraid not," said the Colonel honestly, with a sigh; "but she must. She is only eighteen, and time will do its work for the rest."

"I would not be too sure of that. I have seen some very sad cases."

The Colonel groaned in spirit. "I cannot help it," he replied; "she shall never marry that fellow with my consent!"

"From what my son tells me, Wyldeman is a man who will stick to her. Are you sure you are not only putting off the

evil day, and giving yourself a lot of unnecessary pain?"

"I cannot help it! It shall never be with my consent!"

"If I may speak as an old friend, I should say in your own interest that it is worth reconsideration."

"I have considered and reconsidered it, but always with the same result."

"Then there is nothing more to be said. But I am convinced it is not always wise for we elders to consider our own feelings and self-interest in these matters too closely. You are, I think, aware that I have given my consent to Dick's marrying Jenny Spillett, and she has at last accepted him? On the whole, I am content, as she is a charming girl, full of goodness and sense, and I think she will suit him very well, though, of course, there

are certain things I should have wished otherwise."

"I am sure she will make him happy! She has been fairly well educated, and she is an excellent and high-principled girl in every way! You know she belongs to one of our best old families in these parts? And if John Spillett gets back his property, I do not think there can be really very much against them," said the Colonel, standing up warmly for his own county and relations.

"Yes, I admit that makes a great difference," said his lordship; "and if poor Dick recovers, we must make them happy in any case."

After a long silence, in which Lord Huntingcroft lighted another cigar, the Colonel turned suddenly upon his friend.

"Do you think, then, Huntingcroft, I am

acting selfishly with regard to my granddaughter?"

Lord Huntingcroft had almost given the matter up as hopeless, but he courageously seized this new opening.

"I do not go quite so far as that," he said, with much kindness in his tone; "but I do think, honestly, after the young people have been imprudently allowed to fall in love with each other, and as there is absolutely nothing against the young fellow himself, personally, you are rather straining your prejudices."

The Colonel winced, but made no reply.

Lord Huntingcroft, seeing that he had made a strong impression, wisely turned the conversation on the affairs of John Spillett, and nothing more passed between them on the subject of Mary.

As Dick seemed now out of all danger,

and on a fair way to recovery, the following morning his father left Whitepatch to attend pressing matters connected with his large property ; but from the Colonel's humble manner, and the warm shake of the hand he gave him at parting, he had some hope that his hazardous interference on behalf of the distressed lovers would be successful.

Long and fiercely, indeed, had the old man again debated the matter in his mind that night. "Then, he had been acting selfishly, imprudently, and straining his prejudices. Every one seemed against him, even his old friend Huntingcroft, whose feelings and prejudices were so nearly allied to his own."

After Lord Huntingcroft's departure, he ordered his horse and went out for a ride, still feebly fighting with himself. He rode

a long way, forgetting his luncheon, and towards evening returned home by the sands. The setting sun lighted up the shore and the falling waves. It reminded him of his own declining life, and that in a few years he should be setting to his final rest also. He thought of his last ride there with Mary, of her charming grace and affectionate disposition, of her deep distress at his refusal to sanction her engagement, of her earnest and constant nature—when he suddenly started off Don Quixote at a gallop, and rode for home as fast as he could go.

On arriving at the Manor, he hastily flung down his hat and whip, and went straight up to the room in which Dick was lying on a sofa. He was alone, as Jenny had gone to pay a visit to Mary.

"Huntingcroft," he said, "if you and

your friend Wyldeman can find Mary, I will give my consent to the marriage."

Dick's astonishment and delight was exceeding, and he warmly congratulated the Colonel on his resolution. "You will never repent it," he said; "and when you know Wyldeman, you will say I am right!" He would not, however, disclose Mary's secret, until he had consulted Jenny. He only said, "I will telegraph to Wyldeman at once, and you may be sure Miss Doddingstead will be found before long."

After his long ride and fast, the Colonel that evening got through a famous dinner, and looked remarkably cheerful. Not a hint did he give to Miss Doddingstead of his surrender, but he silently drank long life and much happiness to Sir Francis and Lady Wyldeman, and grimly made his

daughter drink a glass of champagne without telling her the reason why.

After dinner, he lighted the great pipe before the comfortable old fireplace—which warmed without scorching—and felt very happy, with the venerable Shot in his accustomed place on the hearth. He turned over in his mind the question of name. Should it be Wyldeman-Doddingstead or Doddingstead-Wyldeman ?. This was a delicate point. Sir Francis was now the head of his house. He supposed it would have to be the latter; but the second boy should take the name of Doddingstead only, with the property belonging to it. Mary's fortune could go to the eldest son by way of compensation—he should hold out for that arrangement, and he saw the face of his second great grandson in the glowing embers, until he fell into

a gentle doze—when, lo! what is this? The pale maiden of the eastern stairs glides swiftly into the room unheard, perches herself upon his knees, places two loving arms round his neck, and gives him as warm kisses as if she were alive; old Shot, too, joining himself to the group—a keen scent for apparitions apparently not coming within his experience—and a sweet voice amidst tears exclaims, "Dear grandpapa, I have never left the house!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE HERO ENTERS WHITEPATCH BY THE FRONT DOOR.

It was just before Christmas, and the short winter day was fast closing in with a darkening gloom that heightened the effect of the bright fires and the general sense of comfort and cheerfulness of a well-kept country house; while without, the first flakes of winter snow were falling with the welcome and refreshing stimulus of all seasonable arrivals.

Who can heighten that eternal poem of nature—the meeting of true lovers, the

bright, happy face of the hero, and the shy joy of the heroine, as they stand in the porch lighted by the blazing fire in the hall, which burnt that evening with unusual vigour, as if it also was aware of the vast importance of the occasion ?

Everything had been settled in the most orthodox and correct manner. The affairs of Sir Francis were found to be in a much sounder and more flourishing condition than the Colonel had anticipated—he having overlooked the fact that his transactions with the father had taken place before he came into the family property, and that Lady Wyldeman had been a sensible and prudent wife. Sir Francis quite confirmed the guarantee of his friend as to his generosity of spirit in accommodating himself to the feelings and wishes of others ; and the Colonel's chickens were disposed of

in the manner on which he had set his heart.

After Mary had helped Sir Francis off with his coat, and had submitted to another hug which made her think what strong fellows men were, she ran in and brought out her grandfather from his room. The two men found each other different from what they had expected from the highly correct and studied letters which had passed between them; and they at once struck a cordial note in unison that augured well for the future. Mary stood with her arms interlaced behind her in the firelight, and glanced from one to the other with deep happiness in her heart, as they talked about the weather and the coming snow with as everyday an air as though Sir Francis had only just dropped in for a visit on his way home to the next village.

Aunt Augusta, when she appeared, thought our hero was very like the portraits of Henry the Eighth!

The dinner that night was very gay. Sir Francis was extremely animated, and had a good deal to say about what went on in the great world that was new and interesting to his audience, and all felt that a fresh and welcome element was introduced into their life; though the Colonel remarked that he eat his four-year-old mutton, which had been carefully hung and kept for his arrival, as if it only came from the butcher's —"his friend was very different in this respect"—nor was the fine magnum of champagne appreciated any more than if it were water. Harrison told Eliza that he would do; but that he ought to have a dose of aconite, or he would never sleep that night after all that excitement. It may,

however, be remarked that our hero slept remarkably well in the Bride's Chamber, which had been allotted to him.

It had been a great question, before he came, what room he was to occupy. Miss Doddingstead thought he ought to be put through the ordeal of the Quixote. Mary would not hear of such a gloomy room being given to him, in such an unfortunate part of the house. (She had not objected to its being occupied by the Hon. Dick.) The Colonel thought he ought to have the room that his son had always used. Mary said he should have the Bride's Chamber.

"But that is all wrong," said the Colonel; "he is not a bride. That would turn it into the Bridegroom's Chamber."

Mary laughed and said, "Why not, grandpapa? In this case the bride will have to be taken away;" and she gained

her point. The fact being, the young minx had long settled in her own mind that when she married and became mistress of the Manor, that was the room she would occupy, as it was the pleasantest in the house and the easiest of access; and the great iron bar over the door at the foot of the stairs gave it that feeling of security which a woman loves well—even if she have her husband by her side.

The good old Conservative Colonel was again a little disturbed to find Sir Francis did not eat cheese or drink his glass of beer. A suspicion arose in his mind as to his politics, and with deep diplomacy, as he thought, he sounded him. Sir Francis, notwithstanding Mary's warning glance, soon disclosed that he was an advanced Liberal. "Mary must turn him round," he thought; "but she must do it before they

were married. If he had known that before, he did not think he would have so readily consented. They had never had anything but Conservatives at Whitepatch; but the world was turning upside down, and young people seemed to take pleasure in these days in standing on their heads."

After the ladies had retired, Harrison brought in with great state a bottle of '51 port. Miss Doddingstead liked port, but as she hardly knew one wine from another, the Colonel would never let her have even a glass of the '51 vintage; if she had appreciated it, she might have had her share and welcome. Sir Francis did not drink port, he regarded it very much in the light of quack medicine, and stuck to the claret. It was very different with the Hon. Dick. He had found out its merit at once, and enjoyed it like a man.

"Ah, well! one can't have everything," thought the Colonel. "Mary looks as happy as a boy with stolen apples, and I suppose I must be content." Sir Francis, however, smoked, and that was something —a few months ago, it would have been a high virtue that he did not.

Before they left the room, Sir Francis managed to express in a few honest words his great happiness, his sense of the Colonel's goodness, and his earnest desire to do everything in his power to make Mary happy; and his regret at having to take her away from him.

The Colonel sighed, and said, "he did not doubt that it was for her happiness, and that was all he desired;" but in his honest humility he thought that old birds could never see, until it was too late, that young birds were hatched with wings.

After dinner, Sir Francis went the round of the portraits in the drawing-room, and gained the Colonel's heart by saying that, "after all, an old house with its associations was the only fit place for a gentleman to live in." "He is only a theorist Liberal, after all," thought the Colonel; "and Mary will soon put him straight now he has a stake of his own in the country."

The next morning there were rival claims on the attention of Sir Francis. Mary wanted to take him first up to her own quarters and show him all her pets, and then to take him over to the church to help her and Spillett in the decorations for Christmas Day, which was on the morrow. But our hero had unfortunately remarked on the quaint and original tone of Don Carlos, with an air of great innocence, as if he had never stood in the cold for hours

listening to it before; and he received the unprecedented honour of an invitation to go up and see the workmanship of its venerable interior. This was an invitation not to be slighted on any consideration, and Mary decided to put off the visit to her apartments until another time.

When they got into the tower, Sir Francis was greatly struck with the beauty and solid excellence of such an old clock; and the Colonel, in his enthusiastic delight, proceeded to set the striking part in motion to show him how it worked—when there was a whirl, a snap, and a disaster that was heartrending; for though Don Carlos would still go on pointing mournfully to the hour, his voice would not be heard on Christmas Day, an event which the Colonel was sure would cast a gloom over the whole parish, and make them think some

dreadful thing had happened at the Manor. He hurried his young friend down, and went to his room to get his tools and see what could be done before to-morrow.

Sir Francis began to find more and more that the Colonel was a very different sort of man from what he expected, and he took an affectionate liking for him, which was all the greater for not having had a father of his own whom he could love or respect. For, after all, is it not people's oddities that often really endear them to us, however much we may admire and respect them in other ways? That is, however, if we are kindly and penetrative ourselves, otherwise we are apt to find them a bore!

Mary and Sir Francis went over to the church, followed soon afterwards by Spillett and Jack, the garden boy, armed

with a plentiful supply of evergreens and holly berries. Then the Rector soon put in an appearance, and the two men were introduced. Sir Francis thought he was no end of a nice old boy, and the Rector was of opinion he was an excellent young fellow who seemed to have escaped spoiling, and that his old friend had nearly made a terrible mistake in rejecting him. Having seen that Mary had everything she wanted, and promising to send her a ladder and steps, he declared the church was too cold for him, and departed.

Jenny soon saw that the decorations would have to be done to all intents and purposes by herself, as Jack's genius for decorating was limited to fetching and carrying; though he displayed such originality in his ideas of how things should be held, that Jenny's patience was sorely tried.

What a delightful place for a pair of lovers is an empty, rambling old church, with its big pillars in the centre, its high pews, and its odd corners that get out of sight! Sir Francis and Mary decided they would do the side chancel first, and then come and help Spillett with the rest. He fetched and carried, but in the matter of holding, he showed himself to be even more stupid than Jack, who, at any rate, did not get his hands so perpetually in the way of what Jenny was tying up, nor so close to her that she had neither room to work nor sometimes even to breathe; and when Jenny, somewhat puzzled at last by the unnatural silence, came round to see if they had gone out, she found them seated in a high pew—with little done beyond a few evergreens tied together.

Soon after one, John came over to say

that luncheon was ready, and the Colonel was waiting; so they hurried over to the Manor. Jenny decided it would be impossible for her to find time to go to her dinner, and so she sent Jack to get his, with orders that he was to bring her something to eat when he returned.

They found the Colonel seated at the table with an intent air of express business, as if he were a great leading barrister with an important case, and five minutes to get his luncheon. The young people sat down and set to work, for though Sir Francis did not much care what he ate or drank, yet he had a good healthy appetite, and we all know that going to church is hungry work.

They had nearly finished, when Harrison threw open the door and announced, Captain Huntingcroft!

He had great news to tell. He had received a letter that morning from his lawyers, informing him that the Levys had capitulated, and agreed to accept a compromise, by which John Spillett would be reinstated in the family property at Ixstead, and receive a large sum of ready money in lieu of his claim on the property at Shrimpgate. He had come off himself to bring the news. Heavy and Young had wanted to hold out for even better terms—that is, Heavy had, as "there was no saying what might be the ultimate value of the land at Shrimpgate." Young thought otherwise, "that Shrimpgate was now at its high-water mark, with rivals springing up in every direction, and that it would decline in value." The Hon. Dick himself had only been anxious to reinstate John Spillett at Ixstead. Money

was no great object to him, and he had pressed a speedy settlement.

Mary was in great delight at this news, and the Colonel was so interested, that he forgot all about his clock for some minutes.

"But where is Jenny?" said Dick, "I must tell her directly?"

"We left her in the church putting up the decorations for to-morrow," replied Mary.

"Oh! Then I will run over and find her at once!" he said.

"Won't you have some luncheon, Captain Huntingcroft?" asked Miss Doddingstead.

"No, thanks. Not now;" and he set off at once for the church.

"How nice men are when they are in love!" thought poor Miss Doddingstead. "But, then, they never remain long so," she again thought presently.

"Let us run out and tell John Spillett," said Mary to Sir Francis, and the two lovers started off for the stables.

Jenny was perched up in the old square reading-desk, munching a large crust of dry bread, with a small jug of milk in her hand, calmly inspecting the general effect of her work, when Dick burst in at the chancel door close upon her.

She started up in such surprise that she upset her milk over the large Prayer-book. But she was soon in Dick's arms, with her jug in one hand and her crust of bread in the other. She had had a long letter from him that morning, in which he mentioned that he was going down to spend Christmas with his father, and he was the last person she had expected to see.

How happy they were, and how it seemed only one minute (it was nearly

half-an-hour) before Sir Francis and Mary stole in slyly upon them!

Jenny then declared they must set to work at once, or the decorations would never be finished. Indeed, they were little more than half done, after all, and it is sad to relate that even the work-respecting Jenny succumbed to the temptation of dalliance; and on the following day Harrison was very sarcastic on the decorative performances of the lovers, and declared they had made the church "look like a pig with one ear."

But the old Rector was highly amused, as he had quickly heard of the arrival of the other lover, and had anticipated the results. They had even forgotten to put any holly berries in his pulpit and reading-desk.

When they returned to the Manor, the

Colonel and Mary were anxious to keep the Hon. Dick for Christmas Day, but he declared that he would not leave his father alone on that day for anything in the world, and Jenny was highly pleased at his resolution, thinking he would prove constant after all.

John Spillett drove him to the station, Jenny sitting with Dick behind in the dog-cart. After an affectionate and warm farewell in the waiting-room, he started off with a happy heart, to travel all night, and join his father early on the following day.

CHAPTER XII.

OUR HEROINE IS DRIVEN BY FATE ON NEW DANGERS.

It was finally settled that the two marriages should take place together in Whitepatch church on the 1st of June. Great had been the discussion on this matter. Sir Francis and the Hon. Dick had wished to have it much sooner. First, it was put off out of consideration for the feelings of Lady Wyldeman, who tenaciously guarded the respect due to her husband's memory, who, with all his faults, had been good to her. Then, Mary had a strong objection to being married in the month of May. It

was an unlucky month, and she was sure it would bring misfortune. Her father and mother had been married in May. Jenny also wished to have time to establish herself in her new home, and supported Mary in advocating the 1st of June. She even declared to the Hon. Dick that for her part, "June twelvemonth would please her quite as well." She and her father had quitted their service at the Manor, and established themselves at Ixstead. As I have said before, it was a charming old house, somewhat in the style of Whitepatch, though without the individuality or the ghosts and hiding-places on that strange old building. It stood on high ground, and the church tower close by could be seen in fine weather across the Channel, forming in old times a well-known landmark for smugglers.

Sir Francis and the Hon. Dick had both retired from the army, and spent much of their time in Kent, establishing themselves at the Little Sack, now the property of John Spillett, Esq., of Ixstead. But such constant battles ensued between these two gentlemen's gentlemen and Mrs. Crippin, all packed together in this little establishment, their late hours (eleven o'clock!), their interference, their cigars, the difficulty of feeding them, and their "shameful" flirtations with Miss Tumber—that, to judge from the noise and confusion, the premises in the rear of the Little Sack more resembled a disorderly lodging-house than a retired and peaceful cottage in the country, occupied by well-bred servants.

The two valets, in fact, were bored to death, and could not resist the temptation of "drawing" Mrs. Crippin on every possible

occasion, their two masters being much too happy and occupied in their own affairs to pay much attention to the long tirade of complaints which Mrs. Crippin poured upon them every morning, interspersed with equally tiresome digressions on the subject of their dinners.

This good woman had a fixed idea in her head that nothing was ever to be got on a Monday, or even on a Tuesday, or much more easily on a Wednesday; in fact, that on no other day in the week could she obtain them anything they asked for except on a Saturday; but it was found in actual practice, that even this highly favoured day often failed to produce the dish demanded, and they had still to be contented with the one Mrs. Crippin had herself determined was the best for them.

Jenny had shown much energy and good

taste in arranging her new home. She had, however, some comical experiences with her servants, one or two fine gentlemen and ladies taking themselves off when they found their new master and mistress had "only been servants."

As she had declared she would not leave her father alone, it had been decided that she and the Hon. Dick were to make Ixstead their country home during the lifetime of Lord Huntingcroft. The old stables, consequently, had to be pulled down and new ones built; and for carrying out this great project a committee was formed, consisting of the Colonel, his ex-coachman, Sir Francis, and the Hon. Dick. Certainly, the plans of a new city could have been made in the time it took this committee to settle those of the new stables. The Colonel and John Spillett entrenched

themselves in their old-world ideas, and could not be brought without enormous difficulty to see any merit in the "new-fangled notions" of Dick and his friend. John Spillett was sure "no horse would ever eat his food out of a manger built and placed like that." The Colonel was equally certain the horses would be "starved to death with cold in the winter, with so many ventilators and such a great space of cold air over their heads." Finally, the ideas of the young people prevailed, though Spillett, we may add, has never become reconciled to his new stables. And yet, with a fresh invention every six months, they are now considered quite out of date!

The intercourse between Whitepatch, Ixstead, and the Little Sack was continuous; and Jenny, against her own judgment,

and to please her lover, invited the Colonel to dinner. It was a famous sight to see him solemnly leading in with great ceremony his ex-housekeeper, and John Spillett taking in Miss Doddingstead; but the Colonel and Jenny could not get on at all together, and the former was thankful to find himself by the side of his old coachman when the ladies had retired. Nor could Spillett get very far with Miss Doddingstead, beyond a few remarks on the weather and the new stables. The Hon. Dick and Sir Francis were not a little amused at the grim proceedings of these high-contracting parties; but Mary was distressed, and the Hon. Dick had to confess that the dinner was somewhat of a failure as far as the elders were concerned. But, doubtless, it would be as easy to make a tunnel between London

and New Zealand as to bring some people together!

But I must hasten on to more serious matters. Jenny was wrong for once in her confident opinion that when the Colonel's consent was obtained to Mary's marriage, her love for Sir Francis would triumph over her fear of the spiritual world. After the first excitement of meeting was over, our heroine was haunted with an ever-increasing dread of bringing some heavy misfortune on herself and her lover, if she did not obey the mysterious writing on the window of the library.

Her first long trouble and suspense no sooner ended, her conscience became disturbed in a new way about her conduct to her grandfather. She now interpreted the mysterious warning, which twice she thought she had heard, urging her to quit

the secret rooms, as a spiritual injunction to obey the will of her grandfather, and that in having forced him into an alliance which he considered dishonourable, she had been committing a wicked act and tempting Providence. She attributed his apparent cheerfulness and content with the new order of things to his goodness and loyalty of character. The early death of her father and mother had always made a deep impression on her mind, and the poor child had been brought up in an atmosphere of ghosts; her dread of which had been fostered from an early age by the irresponsible tongues of servants and cottagers. No sooner was the day of her marriage actually fixed, than she secretly determined she would even yet remain single, if her lover should be rejected by the spirit of Richard Doddingstead—if he

appeared to only one of them when she took him to the library. She never doubted that he would appear, and made no calculations as to her future action if he did not.

Mary was so open to Sir Francis on matters in general, that he was not a little troubled to know what could be weighing on the mind of his gentle maid, or to account for the strange far-off look he now and then caught in her eyes. He finally came to the conclusion that her health and spirits had suffered from the long confinement and strain on her nerves, but that a little time would restore her.

Another ghostly subject, also, exercised the mind of our heroine at this period, though in a less degree. The tall figure of Van Goyen, in his antique naval dress, had appeared to her in a dream, and she

thought she was with her grandfather and Harrison looking for something in the chalk hole.

On this subject she discoursed to Jenny, who divined the dream after this manner.

"It means, I expect, Miss Mary, that he wants to be found and properly buried. I thought the Colonel was going to search for his body. I should have him found, and then perhaps he will be quiet."

Mary fully believed the tradition in the family that Van Goyen had been buried with some treasure in the underground passage, and she now became anxious to lay in peace this terrible visitant, before she passed the ordeal in the library, as she was convinced he was the real cause of misfortune in the house. Miss Grandison had confided to her what her father had seen on the night of his death (as

the General had related his adventures to his wife when he retired to bed). One of the cottagers had also told her that it was believed the gang of smugglers who killed Van Goyen had been headed by a Doddingstead, and that it had served him (Van Goyen) right. She thought the crime of Richard Doddingstead had been chiefly an accident, but the other crime had been a deliberate one that had left a curse on the house—so many of the younger members of her family had died on coming to the age of manhood in an inexplicable manner.

She resolved, then, to induce her grandfather to carry out his project of making a search in the underground passage, which seemed to have escaped his memory.

The Colonel consented without any very great difficulty, and a day was fixed.

It was arranged that the Hon. Dick and Sir Francis, the Spilletts, the old Rector, and Harrison were to take part in the exploration. Miss Doddingstead, also, was to be invited.

Dick now thought that his father would greatly enjoy this exciting adventure, and as Lord Huntingcroft was in town, it was finally decided he should run down for a short visit to Ixstead, which he had not yet seen, and thus kill two birds with one stone.

The news of this intended event soon leaked out, and the excitement in the neighbourhood rose to such a height over the "enormous treasure and the dead bodies that were going to be found in the Manor chalk hole," that the Colonel grew very angry. He was still more disgusted when several managers of the local papers

wrote to him requesting permission to send a reporter for the occasion, and if the young people had not used great exertion to keep him to his purpose, he would have quashed the affair altogether.

He would, however, only consent on condition that the actual day of the search was kept a profound secret, and another day accordingly had to be fixed, which not a little disturbed his lordship's arrangements in town, who, nevertheless, promised to come on the appointed day.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COLONEL IS MADE HAPPY.

When the day arrived, Jenny drove up to the Manor with a dashing pair of high-stepping ponies in a little carriage, with Lord Huntingcroft by her side. She had taken to riding and driving with the natural instincts of her race, and soon learnt to acquit herself with ease and skill, looking particularly well on horseback with her womanly figure, or with the whip in her hand when driving. Lord Huntingcroft had divined it was her secret ambition to drive a pair of ponies, and he had sent her down these and the carriage

from town as a present; and never were there two greater friends, as she was not in the least afraid of him, and he delighted in her frank naturalness.

Dick drove over the new Squire of Ixstead in a dog-cart, following behind.

When they arrived at the Manor, they found several suspicious-looking light carts about, and a large crowd near the outer gate.

"The devil fly away with them!" cried the Hon. Dick, "they have discovered the day! But who could have let the cat out of the bag?"

The matter was very simple. It had been known that Lord Huntingcroft was coming down to be present at the great search, and his arrival had been daily watched for with as much care as if he were a favourite for the Derby.

They found the poor old Colonel in a great state of indignant excitement. "Two rascally reporters had had the impudence to send in their cards," and he had also discovered the crowd at the outer gate.

But Lord Huntingcroft, well used to elections, made light of the matter, and the Colonel in the end consented to go on with the search, though he hotly refused to admit either of the reporters. His lordship, always with an eye to elections, thought this rigorous exclusion was a little unnecessary, but he did not make any remark. It was a private house, after all, and the Colonel was in his rights.

At length the exploring party were mustered in the long passage leading to the old dairy, armed with pickaxes and shovels, and with lanterns and lights of every description. A more riotous-looking

assembly has been seldom seen in a quiet country house in these unromantic days.

The Colonel had such confidence in Harrison's practical abilities, that he gave him the command of the executive.

The old Rector and his sexton—who was also of the party—from their professional knowledge of interments, were expected to supply the necessary *flair* in hunting for the body of Van Goyen.

As soon as they had entered the old dairy, the Colonel—with a scent for inquisitive intruders at all times keen, but now greatly sharpened—caught sight of a strange face peeping down at them through the gratings of the dairy window. He stopped the proceedings, and indignantly sent off Harrison to turn out this "impudent and audacious fellow."

The latter returned before long declaring

he could find no one in the garden. But he took an opportunity of whispering to his old friend Spillett, his opinion that "that money-grubbing fellow, John, had been bought."

They now entered the passage leading to the chalk hole.

The old sexton was sure the body would be found in the deepest part of the cave, and advocated their searching there first with much professional tenacity.

In truth, the chalk hole was such a large place, it was difficult to decide where to begin, and such differences of opinion now arose, and such time was wasted in discussion, that Lord Huntingcroft, who did not find the air of the place remarkable for its warmth or dryness, began to be rather alarmed at his rashness in coming there, and to regret that he had not brought

with him a foreman from one of his mines, famous for his sagacity in subterranean matters.

The opinion of the Rector in the end prevailed. He thought that, as there was a treasure in the case, it would be better to search first near the entrance, as that was the place experience had shown was often adopted for purposes of concealment, being the least likely to be suspected. So at length they set to work at the ground beneath their feet.

A strange scene they presented. John Spillett and Sir Francis, Harrison and the sexton, digging and shovelling with all their might, the rest standing round with lights in their hands, and the quaint old underground passage, that had not been disturbed for more than a century and a half, resounding to the noise of

eager voices and the blows of pickaxes and shovels.

Mary stood by, admiring the strength and vigour of her lover; indeed, he would have made a splendid navvy, or number five in a University eight. The Hon. Dick, in consequence of his recent illness, was forbidden to take an active part in the proceedings, and he was more interested, to say the truth, in watching the effects of light on Jenny's famous hair than in the results of the search. Soon they dug up a huge clasp knife, such as were worn by sailors in old days. This rusty old implement, which had probably taken part in many a daring adventure, caused not a little excitement, and the old passage rang with the exclamations of anticipation. But after much fruitless labour, nothing more was found here, and another council of war was called.

This time it was decided to follow the advice of the sexton, and they proceeded in a body to the large open space in the centre of the cave that has been described before.

Sir Francis now exhibited an unusual amount of practical common sense for the scion of such a feather-brained race, and suggested that they should probe the ground with some sharp instrument before they proceeded to dig further. Harrison, who found his back already beginning to ache with such unwonted exertion, caught at the suggestion, and rushing off to the kitchen, to the great astonishment of Eliza, he seized an armful of old spits of different sizes, and soon returned with them.

With these they now thrust and probed in every direction into the soft chalk which lay at the bottom of the hole. For

some time, nothing could be found, but at length John Spillett thrust his spit into something that sounded hollow. Again the excitement revived, which rose to fever heat when they unearthed a large tea chest. The old sexton "was sure he was right." But, alas! on opening the lid, they found only sundry packages of mouldy tea, almost in powder, a dozen yards of French silk, apparently little injured, a few rusty cooking utensils, and a long tin canister with a marine chart in it and the word "Raven" written on the cover.

After much searching and several false alarms, nothing more was discovered in this part of the cave, and they held another long consultation. His lordship buttoned up his coat a little tighter, and thought of his afternoon whist in St. James's Street.

But Mary had now a brilliant inspiration.

She thought that the smugglers of old were not common murderers, and that they might have had a conscience and buried their victims close to the church.

The Rector seized the truth of this idea, and they all set off for the passage terminated by the church wall.

On arriving here, they found the chalk soil close to the wall looser than it had been elsewhere, and Harrison very soon struck something hard with his spit. The excitement became intense when they uncovered, first a leg-bone, and then a complete skeleton, mixed with thick dust, decayed fragments of cloth, a leathern sword-belt, and some naval buttons nearly black with age. They took out the whole skeleton and put it together on the ground. It was that of a man of great strength and stature. Tresses of black hair still clung

to the skull, which had a deep fracture on the left side of the forehead that had penetrated through the brow to the eye, as if it had been done with a heavy cutlass or axe. Sir Francis thought that Van Goyen must have been killed in fair fight, judging from the position and nature of the wound, rather than that he had been murdered in cold blood. They then searched round the place where the skeleton was found, but there was no sign of the chest of silver money. At length Jenny probed in the corner to the right, and quickly found something hard underneath. Again the excitement was so great, that the Colonel set fire to Jenny's dress in his eagerness to get near as they moved the soil. This was soon extinguished by the Hon. Dick with his hands, which were not a little burnt in the operation.

Harrison now dug out a large object done up in a piece of tarpaulin, which, on being uncovered, proved to be a round silver vessel, shaped like a basin, and of about the size of a big kettle-drum. Inside this was rudely packed a number of small sacks of silver coin.

The silver vessel had something which looked like a handle attached to it, and Harrison thought it was a large dish cover. The Colonel then examined it, and gave a shout of delight.

"It is the bell of Don Carlos!" he cried.

They held it up and struck it, when it proved indeed to be a bell in sound condition, and to have a very beautiful tone.

The Colonel's transports were so great that he did not care to look for anything more. The others, however, thought it a pity not to continue their investigations,

and they proceeded to search the rest of the passage.

During all this latter time, Lord Huntingcroft had observed some one standing in the rear of the group, bending down in the half light, and rapidly making notes. Apparently, the others had been too busy and interested to notice him.

"Our friend the reporter," he thought; and he was highly amused. But he wisely held his tongue, fearing a prolonged detention underground should his fiery old friend discover the intruder.

But the Colonel, having now lost interest in a further search, at length caught sight of him.

"Who are you, sir? and what are you doing here?" he exclaimed fiercely, going towards the reporter.

The stranger hesitated a moment, and

then boldly said, "he was the reporter of the *Canterbury Pilgrim*."

Now the *Canterbury Pilgrim* was a fine old Conservative paper, which the Colonel had been in the habit of reading all his life, and on a whisper from his politic lordship, he let the reporter remain without further comment, but thinking to himself, "it was only another sign of the lamentable degeneracy of the age, when a respectable paper like that could descend to such intrusive and impertinent conduct."

Finding nothing more, they shortly gave up the search and returned to the house, carrying with them the bell and the money. The sexton was to return on the morrow and convey the bones of Van Goyen to the church.

When the party reached the hall, great was the discussion on their discoveries.

The Colonel could not understand how his clock bell could ever have got down there.

The Rector thought the matter was very simple. The bell had been taken down for its intrinsic value when the clock had broken down, and exchanged with the smugglers for their goods. In those days ladies and gentlemen were often known to have given even their watches and trinkets, when money was scarce, in exchange for brandy, tea, and silk dresses. He thought the smugglers must have hastily buried their effects with the body, when Van Goyen was killed, meaning to return for them when the disturbance made about his disappearance had a little blown over, and that the family had taken fright, blocking up all the entrances to the chalk hole, keeping a discreet silence on the matter.

"It was very remarkable," he concluded by saying, "how tenaciously traditions were kept alive by simple country people who had not much else to talk about."

When the Colonel opened his *Canterbury Pilgrim* a few days afterwards, there was only a very short and dry notice of the discoveries at Whitepatch; but by the same post came another Kentish journal, the *Shrimpgate Sentinel*, in which there was a long and flaming account of the whole matter, ending up with some very sarcastic remarks on the former wickedness of the Doddingstead family, and on the haughty and overbearing conduct of its present representative.

At first the Colonel was highly indignant, and declared he would prosecute the *Shrimpgate Sentinel* for libel; but, finally, he joined in the laugh against himself.

He had triumphantly replaced the bell of Don Carlos in its old position, and its beautiful tone as it sounded the hours and the quarters had such a soothing effect, that his equanimity was not long disturbed by anything now. He lay awake at night listening to it over his head with enthusiastic delight, happier than a schoolboy with his first knife under his pillow. He even forgave the mercenary and treacherous John, whom Harrison thought should have been dismissed.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARY IN THE COILS OF THE UNKNOWN.

On the day after the exploration of the chalk hole, Sir Francis was obliged to return to his own home to attend to the numerous family arrangements connected with his accession to the property, and to prepare a new home for his mother, who had declined her son's offer of remaining in her old one.

The bones of Van Goyen were carried off by the Rector and his sexton, and deposited in an old chest under the tower, until their final resting-place should be determined, as the Rector had already

commenced an inquiry for any existing member of the family.

Although Mary firmly believed that the evil spirit which brought misfortune to the family would now be laid at rest, yet the final result of the discoveries was only to strengthen her belief in the truth of the traditions which surrounded her family, and to make her more resolved than ever to follow and obey them. A morbid dread of impending misfortune, and an increased fear of having acted wrongly took possession of her mind night and day. She grew more and more like the picture of the pale maiden on the eastern stairs, until her devoted friend Jenny—who constantly ran over to see her—became seriously alarmed.

She decided to take Harrison into her confidence, to see if any of his little medicines would do her any good.

He, also, was alarmed about her, and entered warmly into the matter, and Mary was surreptitiously dosed; but, alas, without any effect, and he had to confess that "a fear of ghosts beat him altogether!"

"She must have a change, Miss Jenny; that is the only remedy I can find. You must get her over to Ixstead at once, and amuse her,—you must give her something else to think about. It's all that fighting with the Colonel, and that hiding-in-a-hole business that's upset her nerves. But nerves is worst of all when they go wrong. You may tonic them up tight for a bit, but snap they go again!"

Jenny reflected a moment. It was a difficult matter to find anything at Ixstead of sufficient novelty to interest and amuse her "sick" friend.

"I know," she said; "I must get up

some entertainment. I must have a little dance or two. She is tremendously fond of dancing, though she does not say much about it, because she never can get it with the old Colonel—with all the lessons she has had—excepting once. I must have some dancing for her; and then we can get Sir Francis down again. She is quite different when he is here."

Harrison thought this an excellent idea, but that Miss Mary's extra love of dancing was not a good symptom either. Mad people were always extra fond of dancing and music, and she looked to him sometimes uncommonly as if she might go that way.

"There is a touch of it in the family, you know, Miss Jenny. The Colonel, he's quite crazy about his clocks, and her father was more than a little queer; he

would sit for days and hardly speak to any one—and she has got a look of him about the eyes sometimes I don't at all like!"

Jenny became still more alarmed, and she determined to make a great effort to "stir Miss Mary up out of her ghost-fit."

On returning home, she consulted Dick. He was of opinion they ought to get up a good dance while they were about it, and perhaps some theatricals; and she could then invite all the neighbours who had called and offered them hospitality on their restoration.

After a little fight with John Spillett's modesty, it was settled they should have a dance. Jenny had never tried her hand at acting, neither had Dick, and the theatricals were accordingly given up.

In a few days, then, Mary was staying at Ixstead, and assisting her friend in the

many preliminary considerations inevitable to these occasions.

Jenny was, no doubt, much inexperienced in the higher duties of a hostess, but she certainly was not so ignorant or destitute of ideas on this subject as her helpless appeals to Mary at this time for advice would have led one to suppose. But she could not prevent her friend from dwelling on the fixed idea which had taken possession of her mind.

Harrison had warned Jenny that she must prevent Mary from "brooding;" and she, finding that it was a relief to her to talk about the subject of the ordeal, encouraged her to do so.

Mary had found out from her Aunt Augusta that Richard Doddingstead had shot his son out of the library window on Ascension Day.

Now, Jenny, instigated by Harrison—who since his wife's strange death had taken a horror to the library, and more than half believed in the appearance of the old squire—had gradually come to the determination, in spite of her own belief in these matters, to prevent the ordeal altogether if she could. Harrison had declared that in the depressed state of Mary's nerves a shock might have fatal consequences.

Ascension Day on this year fell only a short time before the wedding, and she adroitly seized the coincidence mentioned by Mary to induce her to put off the ordeal until that day. She trusted to her good luck and skill to then find other means of putting it off altogether. She now decided also that she would not have her dance until the eve of that day, as this would

prevent there being any reasonable excuse for bringing Sir Francis to Whitepatch from his home duties.

"I am sure that will be a good day, Miss Mary, and appease the spirit of the poor old gentleman in the library; and I begin to think also that my new floor will never be ready much before, and then we might have Sir Francis down for both the affairs."

Mary was a little shocked at having such a serious matter called an "affair" and jumbled up with a dance. She, nevertheless, was struck with the appropriateness of this date and the value of Jenny's arrangement in securing her lover's presence. She accordingly assented. A day fixed, and one that promised to be auspicious and convenient for her purpose, the tension on Mary's mind lessened, and she became a little more herself.

Jenny, seeing that all her affairs were in good train, carried off Mary, her father, the Hon. Dick, and Mademoiselle Julie, for a visit to Shrimpgate, as she "was curious to see" a place which had proved to them such a small mine of wealth.

But a few words must be said about this young Frenchwoman.

Jenny had taken her old friend, Mademoiselle Julie, as her maid, notwithstanding the protests of her father and lover.

"Julie was an honest girl, although she *had* lived in the 'Devil's hothouse.' Julie had stood by her stoutly when she first entered Madame de Gros's. Julie had recently not got on very well with madame, who had promoted another girl over her head, and she had grown sick of dressmaking and the stuffy workrooms." On a recent visit to Madame de Gros

(who treated her old pupil now with as much amiable friendship as if she were an extravagant young duchess), Julie had confided her woes to her friend, and Jenny had on the spot engaged her to come and live with her.

"You are talking nonsense, Dick; you don't understand French women at all! Do you think they are as stupid as English servants, that drag down themselves and their masters and mistresses, by kickle-cackling about a hole in your stocking, and how you didn't come in till six o'clock when you ought to have come in at five? No, sir; French women are discreet, and don't make foolish confidences when they ought not, and if you get their heart, they will serve you for love and not for the wages; and as to talking about Madame de Gros's, the chances are that no

one will ever know from her that there is such a place in the world. My only fear is, I shall soon lose her now that she will have a chance of being seen by respectable men—*respectable* men, do you hear, sir?"

The Hon. Dick beat a hasty retreat and said no more.

Mademoiselle Julie was a superb brunette, with a fine figure and an amiable face, which lighted up with much animation; and, notwithstanding her assertion that she would never leave her friend and mistress to marry, there was reasonable ground for Jenny's surmise, as Mr. Saunders, 'Sir Francis's own gentleman,' was already much struck with her, and even the great Mr. Finch had pronounced her to be "tray chick."

Jenny was also determined to obey her instincts of loyalty in another direction.

She had always retained a tender recollection of her beautiful and devoted mother, whom she had lost when a young girl, and she resolved to invite some of her mother's family to her wedding.

The invitations were accepted, to the dismay of John Spillett, who had a very lively remembrance of his wife's relatives. He had believed that they would not really come.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COLONEL FINDS HIS OPINION IS MUCH SOUGHT AFTER.

JENNY SPILLETT was not long in working out a further development of her plot.

"Dick was so very anxious" that his father and some of his friends and relatives should grace the first festivities given by Jenny in her newly acquired position, that now she found she could not deny him, and the famous dance, after all, would have to be put off until two days before the double wedding, when they would be all assembled for that event.

This unsettled poor Mary's plans not a

little; but her good feeling, as usual, and her unselfish desire not to spoil her friend's important gathering, made her yield without a murmur.

She resolved, however, to find some good excuse for bringing Sir Francis down to the Manor for Ascension Day; and she shortly informed her friend that he had promised to come.

This was another check to Jenny in this remarkable game of honest dishonesty against conscientious infatuation. She felt that Mary was perfectly crazy on this point, and that nothing but stratagem could defeat "those horrid ghosts that had got hold of her."

She again resolved to consult the stronger mind of Harrison.

"The proper person to prevent it, Miss Jenny," he said, "is the Colonel; he has

the power in his own hands. I shall take the liberty of telling him what I think will be the consequences if he allows it. He doesn't perceive the strange, unhealthy state her mind has got into."

"Miss Mary is going to ask him for the key of the library on the morning of Ascension Day; but he does not seem to have the same power of saying 'no' to her now that he used to have," replied Jenny, "and she will persuade him into it, you may be certain. I am afraid, too, anything you may say will only make him want to go the contrary. He is very likely to think you have no right to interfere, and will only take it as an impertinence."

Harrison admitted the truth of this, and that it was very awkward.

"Then he must be got out the way, miss, on the morning of the day. I can

manage it. Mr. Croucher and I can manage it without any one suspecting anything. And you must try and persuade Miss Mary it is a dispensation of Providence to prevent her doing a foolish thing."

"But she won't give it up, Mr. Harrison, I feel sure. She will only persuade Sir Francis to stay a day longer, and do it the day after."

"Then the Colonel must be got out of the way again!" replied Harrison. "You must take your father into your confidence. He hates that old library as much as I do, and I know he will help us. He must fish up some excuse for taking him off early the next day, if Sir Francis stops."

The two confederates having settled the details of their plot, Jenny returned to Ixstead somewhat reassured.

* * * * *

On the eve of Ascension Day Sir Francis duly arrived at Whitepatch, though not a little torn asunder between love and duty, as he had experienced a good share of the usual impediments and delays incidental to the work he had undertaken to accomplish.

Mary, after a lengthy debate in her own mind, and many consultations with the perfidious Jenny, had finally settled her plan of action—the arguments and entreaties she should use with her grandfather to obtain the key of the library, the exact hour she should take her lover there afterwards, and what she should do when she had entered the room.

Never had Sir Francis found the poor gentle maiden more charming than she was that evening, though he wondered not a little at the extraordinary brilliancy of her eyes. She clung to him in spirit with all

the might of her heart, and felt more keenly than ever how hard it would be to give him up. If some beneficent fairy had whisked them off and married them at that moment, she would have been only too glad to yield to her fate, whatever it might be. But with her, as with her grandfather, a preconceived idea of some definite line of conduct clearly marked out kept a fixed hold on her mind that no subsequent vibrations of feeling could easily shake now. He had been forced to yield by the sting of his own conscience, which charged him with selfishness and careless neglect. Mary had only her great love to combat, and a fear of selfishness and a wilful neglect of a higher power to urge her on. She felt herself, also, carried forward, as it were, by some invisible might over which she had no control.

Before breakfast on the next morning, the Colonel received a message from Mr. Croucher, his agent, begging that he would do him the favour of riding over as early as he could, as the new tenant (the Radical the Colonel had admitted by mistake) was cutting down timber.

This red rag perfectly answered the purpose for which it was intended, and to Mary's consternation, breakfast was no sooner finished, than Harrison quietly announced that the Colonel's horse was at the door.

Now, he was not a little ashamed of his Radical tenant—who had proved a thorn in his side from the very beginning—and his carelessness in admitting him, and he would never condescend to speak on the subject ex-officially. So he rose and departed without a word of explanation.

When the Colonel arrived at his destination, the unfortunate man's delinquency turned out to be of not much importance, or of a novel character; but he, Colonel Doddingstead, did not go all that way for nothing, and he came down on the man with more than usual asperity. The tenant lost his temper; then the Colonel lost his, and then Mr. Croucher became very hot, or pretended to, and such a nice little squabble ensued over a bit of timber worth at the outside not more than sixpence, that a good hole was made in the morning before the Colonel rode off the field, after a doubtful victory.

Then his agent took him to see some new farm buildings, some new fences and drainage, and he showed such an unusual disposition to let the Colonel have his own opinion about how things should be done,

that he quite enjoyed himself, and graciously accepted an invitation to honour Mrs. Croucher at luncheon.

This state banquet terminated, he then allowed himself to be carried off to an outlying farm some five miles distant from Whitepatch.

Here there were so many things Mr. Croucher wished to have his opinion upon, which was never once disputed, that the time quickly passed, and he did not arrive home until very late, after a most delightful day.

Mary had refused to go for a ride with Sir Francis, and had remained with him all day about the garden in feverish expectation of her grandfather's return.

When he did not appear until too late, she determined to make an effort to keep her lover for another day.

Sir Francis thought that he "really must go—everything was behindhand."

But Mary sang to him so divinely his favourite songs, and clung to him so earnestly as she said "Good night" at the foot of the stairs, that he was unable to resist the temptation of yielding to "one day more."

That night, Harrison, before he went to bed, had learnt from Mr. Saunders, that "we were going to stay another day."

The next morning, when Mary returned to the hall after breakfast to find her grandfather, she saw him walking off with John Spillett through the outer gate.

By a remarkable coincidence, the latter was anxious to have the Colonel's opinion on a horse he was thinking of buying, and that was coming over early that morning to Ixstead.

Now, as a rule, John Spillett was as little disposed to listen to the Colonel's opinion on horseflesh as Mr. Croucher was on drainage and fencing, and being secretly much flattered by this marked confidence in his judgment, he followed his ex-coachman with cheerful readiness.

But when they reached Ixstead, the horse had not yet arrived, nor did it seem quite clear when it would; and it was a good instance of the power of acting which really lies at the bottom of all human nature when circumstances call it forth, that John Spillett—to whom anything of this kind was entirely foreign—could now get up a sham surprise at the horse's non-appearance that at any rate deceived the Colonel. He was also (dramatically) certain that the horse would appear before long.

The fact is, Spillett had sent for a horse which he thought was in the market, but finding on his return that it had been sold, he had not the presence of mind to confess the truth, or find another expedient for detaining the Colonel.

His confederate, Miss Jenny, however, now stepped forward and relieved him of his *rôle* of artful deceiver, in which, it must be confessed, she was not without some accomplishment.

The Colonel must see her new poultry-yard. She wanted him to tell her if he thought the Dorkings that had been sent her were of a good breed.

He took little interest in poultry, and scarcely knew a Dorking from a Cochin China—wherein, Miss Jenny, it must be observed, was quite an expert; nevertheless, he was always charmed to give "his

opinion" on most things. To Jenny's extreme amusement, he decided that her coloured Dorkings with spotless toes were too big and "regular mongrels." She must change them. He could recommend her an excellent man at Canterbury to go to.

She then trotted him all round the gardens to exhibit the improvements she was making.

Here the Colonel was quite at home, and he gave her much excellent advice, which, it is to be feared, was a good deal thrown away—for is it not a common habit in taking advice, to believe more in the person who gives it than in his capacity for doing so?

Jenny, however, made herself so extremely agreeable and fascinating, that the old gentleman was charmed—for Jenny was a very good-looking young woman,

after all—and he humbly thought to himself that it must have been his own fault they never could get on together before. He even consented to remain to luncheon, and inspect her new floor.

After this, the horse still did not appear, and the two elders went out and groaned in sympathy over the "new-fangled" stables. Here, it was unnecesary for Spillett to act a part.

No horse turning up, Jenny then insisted upon taking the Colonel out in her pony carriage. "She was thinking of changing their sides," and again wanted his opinion.

She kept him out a long time, chattering to him the whole way on every conceivable subject, and finally the Colonel again arrived home very late, after another most delightful day.

Our poor heroine was in despair. Sir

Francis had been so decided in saying he must return on the morrow, and his reason for leaving was so good and honest, that she could not ask him to stay any longer. There remained, however, yet one day clear—the day before the wedding, when he would be staying at the Little Sack, and she endeavoured to make him promise to dine at the Manor on the evening of that day, as she intended to make her visit to the library at dusk immediately after dinner.

Sir Francis now confessed that he feared it was doubtful if he should be able to come at all for the dance at Ixstead; coming down from town only on the morning of the wedding.

But Mary drew such a picture of her disappointment, and the slight it would be to Jenny and his friend Dick, on an

occasion of this kind, that he yielded, promising to come for the dance, even if he had to return the same night by posting to town.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WEDDING GUESTS.

"The Count and Countess de Boulogne, their family and suite, have arrived at Ixstead, the seat of John Spillett, Esquire, for," etc., etc.

Such was the announcement in the *Shrimpgate Sentinel* a few days before the Ixstead dance.

The Count de Boulogne was a tall, vigorous-looking old gentleman with a storm-beaten face, hair perfectly white, and a complexion that resembled old leather. His dress was somewhat remarkable, and not at all resembling the ordinary English

notion of a French grand seigneur. It had a decidedly seafaring cut about it, and if it were not that the Count had such an air of substantiality and authority, and that he wore a little bit of red ribbon at his button-hole, and a foreign dress, he might easily have been taken for a fine old Greenwich pensioner. The Countess was equally remarkable in appearance. She also was a fine-looking old lady, with an air of still greater authority than the Count, and wore the costume of her native Picardy, modified after the peculiar fashion of her native town; her earrings and neck-ornaments were as large and solid as gold nuggets, and her high cap was a marvel of pleated fine linen and snowy whiteness, and her very short petticoats exhibited a pair of still very shapely ankles, terminating in neat shoes. One's first impression, however,

about her was, that she would be a very tough hand to encounter in a bargain. "The family," consisted of two vigorous little black-eyed damsels of the ages of ten and twelve, in the same dress as the Countess, their grandmother; and the suite consisted of a rebellious-looking little French bonne.

These distinguished people were in fact the maternal grandfather and grandmother and two little cousins of Jenny's, who had come over from Boulogne for the wedding.

John Spillett could not get over his ancient terror of this redoubtable couple, though he had never seen them since his own marriage, and he wished they had not come. The Count, also, had modestly objected to present himself on this occasion; but he was instantly overruled by the Countess, who reigned supreme in all

matters connected with dry ground, after the manner of her vigorous race.

The Hon. Dick laughingly declared they had received their title from Julie, who had taken a mischievous pleasure in baffling the persevering inquiries of our old friend the enterprising reporter. However that may be, it is not polite to inquire too closely into such matters on an occasion of this sort, and Count and Countess they must remain during their short stay on English soil. One thing, however, was certain. The Count had received the cross of the legion of honour for services rendered to Napoleon the Third, at a certain crisis in the Crimean war, when good seamen were greatly needed at a moment's notice. The manners of these worthy people also had a certain distinction and dignity, and that inborn sense of knowing how to behave for which

their whole nation was once so famous, and which still retains amongst most of its better sort of inhabitants. The old seaman found it hard work at first to dispose of his time, but Jenny soon set him to work to readjust the rope of the well, a tremendous affair of nearly five hundred feet in depth, by no means uncommon in this waterless part of the county. Then he was to assist his granddaughter in the decorations of the great hall, where the dancing was to take place; and so much did Jenny find on her hands to do, that she had declared to the Hon. Dick that "she should never find time to get married on the day fixed," which, however, her lover did not take for gospel, having a sublime faith in Jenny's powers of doing anything to time if she chose.

The Countess, however, took an immense

interest in examining all the possessions of her son-in-law and her granddaughter, and estimating to a sou what they would be worth in France; and as money and prosperity were her gods, they were now to her the greatest people in the world. The little maidens revelled in scampering about the rambling old house and the pleasant gardens, dancing and clinging round the Hon. Dick, who was their especial friend and provider of nice things to eat at odd times.

The entrance hall at Ixstead, in which the dancing was to take place, was the finest in all the county round, and as large as a provincial town hall, with a high-peaked wooden roof, and a large gallery running across the end of it, and many a gallant fête had taken place there in past times. But it had a stone floor. This little matter, however, was not allowed to

stand long in the way by the enterprising Jenny. As soon as the dance was decided upon, Mr. Tumber was quickly at work with a large staff of extra hands, taking up the old stone flags and laying down a new oak floor in their place. "It would be warmer in the winter," she declared, for one thing. "And then, when she was forced to become a married woman with a husband fond of scrimmaging about, she must have a little amusement at home to keep him off the everlasting railways;" thereby showing her knowledge of one of the secrets of domesticating an active married man with plenty of money.

Then came the question of decorating this hall for the occasion. The Count put his hands behind his back with his legs far apart and considered. He thought ship's flags would be the thing. Jenny caught

the idea, and saw its adaptability to the place. With the assistance of Harrison's relations at Deal, and the Count's own friends at Boulogne, many long canvas bags full of gay bunting soon arrived. Some of these the Count mounted on poles, with bunches of flowers at the top, and arranged against the walls singly (not in groups of threes) to hang forward lance ways; others were hung in profusion from the wooden roof; these, with the assistance of more flowers and green stuff, made the old hall look particularly gay and cheerful, though from the sailor-like way in which the flags were arranged, it was strongly suggestive of a nautical wedding, and the Hon. Dick nearly got his ears boxed for saying that "some one would have to dance a hornpipe after supper."

Then there had been the question of

the music. Dick, who had negotiated the former engagement with Monsieur de l'Orchestre for the General, proposed they should have him again. Jenny assenting, he was engaged. Monsieur sent to inquire the size of the place that would be allotted to him, as he had a lively recollection of the "étroit enfer" he had formerly been enclosed in. Having been assured that it was a large gallery, he made his plans accordingly with his usual enthusiasm, and even ordered a new dress-suit for the occasion. He was also much gratified by another little matter. The Colonel, on hearing that he was coming, and recollecting with shame his former treatment, sent him also a gracious invitation for the wedding breakfast, if "his numerous engagements would enable him to honour them with his presence."

The supper was to come from Messrs. Cobweb and Soufflé in town; and the Hon. Dick undertook the responsible office of head butler. Thus, by the day of the dance, everything was in order and readiness.

We must now take a run across to Whitepatch, and see what they are about in that ancient abode. There also, great were the preparations for the wedding breakfast, and the reception of the guests who were to arrrive. Lord Huntingcroft and his daughter and her husband with their little girls, who were to be Jenny's bridesmaids, were to put up at Ixstead; also some of Dick's old brother officers, one of whom was to be his best man. But at Whitepatch, they were to have two of Sir Francis's younger sisters, who were to be bridesmaids to Mary, his brother, his uncle and aunt, from Paris, with their daughter (another

bridesmaid), and some more ex-brother officers, and male friends of Sir Francis, one of whom, his cousin, was to be his best man. There were also to be the Brambles, and Miss Grandison. Lady Wyldeman pleaded ill-health and her weeds as an excuse for not appearing. Sir Francis feared his mother had not forgiven the Colonel for his animosity to Sir John, though she had been very kind in her letters to Mary. Neither would the Colonel ask Lady Worthingham, which that good lady resented bitterly, saying, "That it was she who had found a husband for his granddaughter after all!" But it was himself the good Colonel had not really forgiven for the little fiasco he had made about Mary's marriage.

CHAPTER XVII.

JENNY SPILLETT'S DANCE.

The excellent John Spillett was very shy in receiving his guests, many of whom he had known all his life in another capacity. Neither could Jenny make him put on his white gloves, which he dangled awkwardly in his work-stained hands. But nothing had been more popular than his restoration to his rights, and every one treated him with marked kindness and attention. The Count was infinitely more at his ease, and he and his belongings created great interest from their novelty and originality; and as for the Countess and the little French

maidens, who were allowed to be at the ball, they were as natural as if they had been accustomed to that sort of thing all their lives. Lady Walsall would not allow her two little daughters to sit up for the dance, a very proper arrangement, no doubt, but which all the same sent those little creatures to bed with grief in their hearts, only to wake up with fresh sorrow when they heard the music and all the gay doings below.

The dance opened with a quadrille. In the top set were Jenny and her grandfather the Count de Boulogne, Colonel Doddingstead and the Countess de Boulogne, Mary and Sir Francis's best man, the Hon. Dick and the elder of the little French maidens, Sir Francis and the other little French girl, and Lord Huntingcroft and Miss Doddingstead.

John Spillett had refused to dance, declaring he should only knock some one down.

Monsieur de l'Orchestre had strengthened and selected his band with great pains, and made a careful choice of his music for the evening. The Hon. Dick also, at a hint from the Colonel, had taken care this time that he should be treated with all the respect and attention due to such an excellent and genuine artist, and he was in high spirits and delighted with his gallery, though he stared down with not a little astonishment at the Count and Countess and their two grandchildren. Soon, however, the old hall resounded to his lively and inspiring music.

The Hon. Dick and Sir Francis were delighted and surprised by the spirited dancing of the little maidens and their

knowledge of a quadrille. The vigour of the Countess, however, was almost too much for the good old Colonel, but he resumed the steps of his youth, almost without thought, and their performance was much admired by the lookers-on. The Count also displayed a remarkable activity at the other end of the set, to the great amusement of Lord Huntingcroft, though his partner secretly thought him "a dreadful old man," and that nothing would induce her to dance with him.

Our heroine of the evening was as good as her word, and entirely eclipsed every other woman in the room excepting Mary, who was radiant in loveliness that evening —but the old sad look was lurking in her eyes. Jenny's brilliant skin and unusually fine shoulders appeared to great advantage in an evening dress. She was also radiant,

with happiness; and the brightness of her eyes could be seen the length of the hall. She had also persuaded herself that by her skilful diplomacy Mary would be yet married without a visit to "that horrid old room." But Mary had not altered her resolution.

If Monsieur de l'Orchestre had a fault, it was that of not giving quite sufficient time between the dances, according to English notions; but although this cut short the flirtations, and made the lazy men work harder and be more on the alert than they cared for, yet it made the evening "go" with a life and spirit that can rarely be obtained when there are long pauses between the dances. But monsieur thoroughly understood his business, and was always as honestly anxious that the evening should be a success as if he were the hostess herself.

Now he produced a charming waltz called *La Veille des Noces*, which he had composed expressly for the occasion, and dedicated to Mary and Jenny. Mary had her first waltz with Sir Francis, Jenny and Dick floated round the room exchanging tender reminiscences of their first meeting, and the little maidens danced charmingly together to the delight of all the elders in the room.

The decorations of the hall were much admired, and were even a novelty in this corner of England—though the Hon. Dick had declared "it was surrounded by the sea." The flags were real ship's flags, and not draper's imitations of the same, arranged naturally by a real sailor, and not in the stiff way so commonly adopted by landsmen.

Then came the lancers. But what is

this? Miss Doddingstead standing up with the Count, and Lord Huntingcroft with the Countess! Miss Doddingstead spoke French very imperfectly, but Lord Huntingcroft acquitted himself with distinction, and received many compliments from his partner on his good accent. He did not find her after that in any way out of place, and was even heard to declare she was an extremely intelligent old woman; which, by the way, no one had ever doubted after five minutes conversation with her, particularly if it happened to be on any matter of business!

And so the evening wore on. The supper was excellent, if it had not the quaint old-fashioned charm of the one at Whitepatch. Harrison had come over and assisted with his "advice," which had, however, somewhat clashed with the ideas of the men

from Cobweb and Souffle's. He, however, carried matters with a high hand, as an old personal friend of the master and mistress of the house, very much to the improvement of the general arrangements, considered from an anti-conventional point of view.

It had been decided that the dance was to end soon after midnight, and there were only two more waltzes left, when there was a commotion at one of the doors of the hall. Soon the cry of fire was raised, and a great light was seen in the high windows of the hall above the dancers' heads. The music stopped, and the panic became general.

At Ixstead, the kitchens, offices, housekeeper's room, etc., were separated from the house and joined to it by a long wooden gallery or passage with glass windows in the upper part running nearly

its entire length. This gallery communicated with the hall at one end by double doors.

According to the old friendly custom in this part of the world, the servants were admitted to see the dancing, and they thronged the doorway from the kitchen and part of the large gallery for the musicians, leaving the kitchen department entirely deserted.

How the fire arose was never known, but it was supposed to have originated in the housekeeper's room. There was a high wind, and soon the whole block of the old constructions behind was blazing with fury, and the flames spreading towards the house. There was little water on the premises, except in the deep well at the bottom of the court, and the house itself was in extreme peril.

Now was the promptitude and presence of mind of an old sailor seen to great advantage. The Count had rushed out with some of the other gentlemen and servants to the scene of disaster, and he instantly took command of the situation. The flames had already seized on the end of the long wooden passage, and the smoke was pouring in with blinding thickness.

"Détruisez le corridor!" he shouted above the din, and he threw himself with all his weight against one side of the wooded structure. His example was quickly followed by the stalwart Harrison and the mighty Sir Francis, but the old woodwork had been too honestly and solidly made to be easily forced out.

"Des hommes!" shouted again the old sailor, and some more of the gentlemen and servants threw their weight on the side

of the gallery. At length they forced it outwards, with the glass of the windows crashing and flying in all directions.

"L'autré côté!" he again cried.

Here there was the danger of bringing the roof of the gallery on their heads, but it still retained its position, notwithstanding that one side had been forced out.

"Vivement, ensemble!" once more shouted the hardy old veteran of many struggles betwixt life and death.

They now all rushed in a body at the other side, and it fell over, carrying with it the roof—which was still partly attached to it—to the ground. They now set to work to tear away the wooden structure from its holdings and drag it to a safe distance from the house. There were plenty of strong hands, and the work was soon accomplished, and they trusted the

house would be saved if the wind did not carry the sparks to the roof of the old hall.

Inside, all was dire confusion and fright. Some of the women ran screaming in all directions; others fainted on the ground, as they heard the shouts of the men and the crashing fall of the wooden partition, and saw the glaring light through the windows on the flags in the roof—which looked as if they themselves were on fire. The roaring of the flames outside could also be distinctly heard within.

Jenny and her grandmother preserved their presence of mind, and endeavoured to calm the others and prevent them from rushing out into the cold air, though she was sick at heart with anxiety about her rash Dick. He, however, was one of the first to come in and assure them that all danger was at present averted; but his

hands were bleeding from the broken glass, and he was begrimed with smoke and dirt.

The seasoned old buildings behind, which had much wood in them, soon burnt themselves out, and tranquillity was restored; but the dance came to an end, and before long most of the guests departed.

Sir Francis was as black as a chimney sweep, and his eyes were much inflamed by the heat and smoke; but he was otherwise unhurt. The old seaman, however, had not escaped without a severe cut on his forehead, and his shirt front was covered with blood.

But, alas! alas! Jenny's wedding-dress, which had arrived late that evening, and had been left in the housekeeper's room, was completely destroyed!

Now, what did this portend? The burning of a heroine's wedding-dress on the

eve of her marriage? I have questioned all the witches and professors of the black art in the library of the British Museum, but can find no portent or prediction bearing on this cruel case. But surely, unbelievers, in such a decided fatality as this, cannot have the hardihood to pretend that it only meant she would have to find another!

CHAPTER XVIII.

TRIAL BY GHOST.

All Jenny's diplomacy was defeated by her own dance. Sir Francis had made his arrangements to start for town that same night, and take an early train into the county to make a final inspection of his mother's new home; but his eyes soon became so painful and inflamed, that his friends would not hear of his going, and he returned with the Hon. Dick to the Little Sack to put himself under the care of Mrs. Crippin, who was a noted practitioner of old women's remedies.

Mrs. Crippin got out of bed with remarkable cheerfulness to repair the damages sustained by Sir Francis; and Miss Tumber, also, had to rouse herself from a deep sleep to go down and light the kitchen fire.

The next morning, however, found no improvement in our hero's condition; his eyes were still inflamed, and his patience was beginning to be sorely tried by Mrs. Crippin's voluble activity—when a rival amateur doctor appeared early on the field in the person of Harrison.

He came armed with authority in the shape of a little note to Sir Francis from the anxious Mary, and he immediately took possession of the patient.

Mrs. Crippin's "rubbishing mess had only been doing harm;" and he flung it contemptuously out of the window under her nose.

Hereupon, ensued such a battle royal, and such "tinkering old idiots," and "bloated varmints" were hurled in the air that the Hon. Dick lay in his bed on the other side of the little passage, with a corner of the sheet stuffed into his mouth—such high dignitaries belabouring each other like fish wives was indeed too delightful, and he never ceased giving an account of it afterwards to Jenny.

Harrison, however, soon cut the matter short, and proceeded to attend to his simple case; whereupon Mrs. Crippin retreated to the kitchen to expend her wrath on Mr. Finch and Miss Tumber.

When he returned to the Manor, he was able to assure Mary that the injury was not serious, and that if Sir Francis followed his instructions, and took his little medicine as he had directed, he would be well

enough to come over and see her in the afternoon.

Mary did not doubt that Sir Francis would obey her earnest entreaties, and follow the directions of Harrison, and she now proceeded at once to carry out her important project of obtaining the ordinary key of the library from her grandfather, as she could not reach it through the secret passage, a strong lock having been mysteriously placed on the door of the closet under the stairs soon after her release from captivity.

The Colonel had left his guests to amuse themselves, and had retired to his own room to attend to his usual affairs.

Mary found him busily engaged in looking over his agent's accounts, not in the best possible humour, and inwardly swearing for the millionth time at the rascally

mischief the repeal of the corn laws had effected on those pillars of the state, country gentlemen. Things were going from bad to worse, and soon there would be nothing left to do but to turn one's whole property into a great park for one's own private recreation. If he had not had the good fortune to have a solid nest-egg in the funds, he might yet live to die in the work-house.

"Grandpapa, Frank's eyes will soon be well again; he is coming over this afternoon, and I want you to let me take him to see the old library," said Mary, coming to the side of his chair, and putting her hand gently on his shoulder.

"My dear child, it is not fit to be seen;" then, repenting of his subterfuge, he added, "To say the truth, I do not wish him to see it for the present."

"But why, grandpapa? He must see it some day or another. I am sure he must have always thought it strange, and wondered what reason you could have for keeping him out."

"Nonsense, my dear; every man has a private place to keep his papers in."

Mary perceived it was no use beating about the bush, and that she must brave his anger and come to the point direct.

"Grandpapa," she said solemnly, "I must tell you something. I have been in the library once, and have seen what Richard Doddingstead wrote on the window, and I believe it—it's quite terrible. I fear that I might bring some dreadful misfortune on us all if I do not take Frank there before we are married."

The Colonel shifted in his chair, and became uneasy.

"You are quite silly, Mary, to believe in such superstitious old rubbish! I thought you had more good sense. Are you sure it was ever written by Richard Doddingstead? I have a great idea those lines were written by his daughter Augusta, who was a half-mad sort of person, and wrote weird poetry. I have some of her precious effusions up in the library now, and I beg that you will not imitate her, and fill your head with such fiddle-de-dee nonsense; she quarrelled with her lover about some stuff of that kind. They say she wanted to make him stay up alone all night on the east stairs—and you will be quarrelling with your husband some day about the same kind of thing, if you don't take care; I am inclined to think he has got a will of his own, as you have yet to discover."

Mary stood a few moments in deep

silence, and as still as the table by her side.

At length she said, "Grandpapa, Frank knows nothing about it, nor do I mean to say anything to him at present; I only wish to take him there before we are married, and obey those words, that I may bring no misfortune on him or myself afterwards by disobedience to those powers of which we know nothing. I feel that I *cannot* marry him until we have been there together."

"Is the girl going mad?" cried the Colonel. "If you begin playing with such things as that already, what will you come to by-and-by? We shall be having you in a strait waistcoat some day!" Then he said more kindly, "I do not wish it, Mary; we have too much of that sort of thing about the old house already, and

I had hoped it would die out in your generation."

Mary again entreated him to allow her to follow her own instincts in the matter; adding that, "now she had seen the writing on the window, she felt that she must obey it at any sacrifice."

"This comes of women's prying! You ought never to have entered the library without my permission. I really cannot encourage such trafficking with the devil," and the Colonel sat back in his chair with an air as if the matter had been judged, and the sentence passed.

"But it is *not* trafficking with the devil, grandpapa!" she cried. "The spirit of Richard Doddingstead is a good spirit, I am sure; he was only unfortunate. And good spirits must be obeyed, or they can punish us as well as bad ones."

"The girl is quite mad!" said the Colonel pushing back his chair, and looking at her over his gold spectacles.

Mary commanded herself, and said slowly in a tone of calm reflection, "No, dear grandpapa, I am not mad; but I have lately had something come over my nature that makes me feel as if I had a link with the other world, and knew what was passing there." Again, the strange far-off look came into her eyes.

The old gentleman stared at her with unquiet wonderment. Mary came and stood close to him again, smoothing his face gently with the back of her hand. Then she said earnestly in a low voice, after some hesitation—

"Tell me truly, did you prevent my poor father and mother going there before their marriage? I dreamt lately that they

came to me and joined their hands together as they stood at the foot of my bed, but when I tried to speak to them they were gone."

The Colonel grew very grave, but remained silent.

"Because, dear grandpapa," she continued, placing one arm round his neck, "that showed that you really believed it, though you persuaded yourself at the time you did not. I do not wish to pain you, but I have a feeling that perhaps the evil might have been averted." After a short silence, she again said with deep earnestness, "Trust me once, dear grandpapa, and believe that women see some things stronger than men, and do not prevent me doing that which I feel drawn to by some irresistible power."

Mary then stood upright, with a look of

high exaltation in her face, and with her hands crossed before her.

The Colonel again remained silent. He was not convinced. He had obstinately all his life refused to believe in the spirit of Richard Doddingstead—chiefly because others had done so, most people thought—and he now determined to make a last use of his present supreme authority over Mary and forbid what he persisted in considering a dangerous folly of superstition.

"No, Mary, my dear child, I cannot allow it," he said at last, though very kindly and gently. "I have always determined to put an end to that foolish superstition in the family, and I wish you, as my future representative, to do the same and not attempt now to revive it."

He drew his chair into its accustomed place again, and half turned to his papers,

as if he wished her to understand that the interview was to be terminated. He did not believe that Mary would really break off her marriage.

But she did not move. Presently she said, almost in a whisper, "Grandpapa, have you never seen one of the spirits in the house? Do you think they have no power, and that we are right in resisting them? Do you know what the poor General saw on the night of his death?

"No!" replied the Colonel, turning round again towards her.

"Miss Grandison told me, and she said last night I might tell you now, if you did not know. You remember, he went to find Monsieur de l'Orchestre after the supper. He lost his way, and got down into the passage by the old dairy, and there the spirit of Van Goyen appeared to him. He became

insensible for a short time, and Lady Grandison is certain the shock killed him, but she did not wish you to know at the time. He told her all about it that night. He had never heard of that spirit before and yet he described it precisely as others had done."

The Colonel was moved to the putting down of his pen, which he had again just taken up.

"And then, Mrs. Harrison. I am certain she saw Richard Doddingstead in the library. When they found her, her eyes were fixed and wide open, with a dreadful look of fear in them. Harrison told Jenny, and he did not believe in ghosts at that time."

She remained silent, to see the effect of her narration.

The Colonel had a strong grain of the

superstition of his race, which he had always resisted from pure obstinacy. He now again recalled to his memory—which, as in many persons of his age, was not active about recent events—the vision he had seen on the east stairs. He could not honestly doubt that, and it now disposed him to believe more readily in the others, especially since the finding of the skeleton of Van Goyen. Mary's account of the death of the General and Mrs. Harrison, and, above all, her manner of speaking stirred him for a moment out of his usual fixed attitude of disbelief. He admitted to himself that the spirit of Richard Doddingstead might be a reality, and that he might, for once, have been wrong in trying to abolish the observance of the family tradition with regard to it. But the force of long habit still bound him

closely, and after a moment's reflection, he felt no disposition to yield even now. Mary was a girl, and the tradition did not apply equally to her. He had always made up his mind to end this "inconvenient and sensational" custom, and he saw no sufficient reason for changing his opinion now.

"No, my dear child," he said, "that writing in the window, at any rate, does not apply to you. You are a girl; go and get married, and do not think anything more about it. The real troubles of this life will come fast enough."

Mary became desperate, and she spoke now with an increased exaltation in the tone of her voice.

"Grandpapa, do not defy the invisible powers that are around us in this house! Remember how the poor General made

light of them and what happened to him."

She had taken hold of his hand and held it tightly between her own.

The Colonel started. The account he had just heard of the immediate cause of his old comrade's death had touched him more nearly than anything else. He now vividly recalled the circumstances of his healthy and vigorous old friend found dead in his bed, and the painful inquest that followed. He had always had an especial horror of sudden deaths as "something unnatural, as distressingly indecorous, and as giving much freedom to familiar gossip," and it was the very last way he should wish to end himself. What if his own should be of this nature? He again recalled the vision on the stairs; the dormant spiritism inherited in his blood rose and

mastered him; a long-prepared revolution took place in his mind; the strong man quailed before the invisible.

Suddenly, Mary became an "Heir of Whi'puth" without a doubt. Mary was right, and she saw clearer in this matter than he did.

He became now as anxious for her to pass the ordeal as she was herself, and his whole arm trembled slightly as he unlocked a drawer and gave her a key without a word.

Mary kissed his hand with a deep curtsey of reverence and love, and vanished with her fatal prize.

Late in the afternoon of that day, Sir Francis was so wonderfully recovered that he was down with Mary in her little garden, and insisting upon helping her to make some alterations in the hut of the goat, which she was doing to tranquillize

her nerves, having escaped from the busy and noisy preparations that were going on for the events of the morrow.

It must be confessed our hero was not an accomplished carpenter, and his comical efforts to saw a plank without buckling his saw, or departing from the line chalked out for him by Mary, with the extreme seriousness of his face during the operation, would have afforded her much amusement at any other time. But she had now far graver matters in her head, and was thinking only of the terrible visit at dusk she intended making that evening.

Jenny had puzzled out the last line of Richard Doddingstead's prophecy, and had come to the opinion that "Hand for Hand" meant "Hand *in* Hand," and that the lovers were to present themselves with their hands joined together. Mary had

quite determined she would not give Sir Francis a hint of what he was likely to see. With a mixture of strong good sense amid all her superstition, she wished to test the matter, without biasing her lover in any way, as Miss Van Tromp had endeavoured to impress upon her that apparitions were only the result of people's own excited imaginations. She had carefully studied the almanack, and found that the sun would set at eight o'clock, and, as they dined at seven, and as it was a clear evening, if she could entice her lover to leave the room with her immediately dinner was finished, they would be in good time to enter the library at the time of dusk. She had decided that as soon as they entered she would take his hand.

"Frank, I want you to come with me to-day when I leave the room after

dinner. I am going to take you to see something."

Sir Francis was only too delighted to fall into this arrangement; but when he had done so on one or two other occasions, the poor old Colonel, who felt himself slipped more and more into the background of Mary's happiness, had such a melancholy air of desertion, that she had quickly put a stop to this lover-like though unsociable proceeding. But there were guests in the house now, and that would make a diversion in his favour.

"You are not to follow me out of the room mind, as you did before, but I will come and call you out in a few minutes, and then grandpapa won't think much about it."

She would not tell Sir Francis what he was to go and see, and he came to the

conclusion that it was some surprise in the way of a present that had newly arrived, or was to do so later in the day.

Mary at dinner, with the fatal key in her pocket, was silent and grave, and Sir Francis wondered much what she had on her mind. The dinner itself was never long at Whitepatch; the ladies retired early, and in a few minutes she came back and beckoned him out.

"I have got the key of the old library, and I want you to come and see it now."

Her lover wondered again at the moment she had chosen. On putting his arm round her waist, as they went up the east stairs, he found that she trembled and walked with some difficulty.

When they reached the door, the key first stuck in her pocket, and then it was some time before she could get it into the

lock. At length the door was thrown back, and after closing her eyes a moment to summon her resolution, she advanced first into the room.

Sir Francis had to stoop at the low door, and then he stumbled at the deep step down into the room. When he recovered his feet, he saw Mary standing motionless between the door and the window. He went up to her and put his arm round her again, but she seemed speechless and rigid and her eyes were fixed and dilated. He could see nothing himself, but the high old chair near the window in the dusky light.

Not so Mary; she had no sooner advanced into the room than she saw the figure of Richard Doddingstead in an antique dress, seated in the chair, with a long fowling-piece in his hand, the butt of which rested on the floor, and to the

right of the chair a little behind, another figure was cowering, like that of a dead woman in the dress of a bride.

Sir Francis began to fear Mary was ill, and with his disengaged left hand he seized one of hers that was hanging by her side. Immediately an electric thrill seemed to pass through him, and he saw also the figure seated in the chair, but the other figure he saw nothing of.

The spirit of Richard Doddingstead slowly turned its head towards them, remained a moment in that position, and then vanished as in a dream.

Mary recovered consciousness, and threw herself into her lover's arms weeping violently. Then, between her sobs, she whispered, "Take me to my own room."

He caught her up in his arms, and carried her like a child through the long

passages until he arrived at her sitting-room, where he placed her on the sofa and, kneeling on the ground by her side, with her arms round his neck, he heard the whole story of Richard Doddingstead and his prophecy, and how when her lover had taken her hand, the figure of the dead woman had instantly gone.

Sir Francis then related what he had seen, and they conversed a long time in the dusk of the evening; but Mary was comforted with the reflection that she had done right, and the evil which had befallen so many of her family would, she hoped, be averted from her.

Her lover was secretly of opinion that the sooner he got his little girl out of this ghostly old place the better; but he would never disbelieve in spirits again.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST OF JUNE.

After a very cold and remarkably late spring, the first of June came with great splendour. The sun smiled with unusual brightness, as if rejoicing in the departure of long-obstructing clouds and darkness. The trees were out in all their fulness of youthful beauty, before heat and dust had faded their virgin freshness; the cherry orchards were even still in blossom, their pink and white bunches glittering in the sun against the blue of the sky; the happy birds darted from tree to tree, gladdening the air with their cheerful joy; and the

undulating country, with its narrow roads and lanes that turn and dip and mount again at every few hundred yards, was thick with white hawthorn—its scent carried by a gentle breeze, which came with invigorating freshness from the neighbouring sea.

Jenny was up betimes, with her window open and the early morning sun pouring into her room, as she stood before her glass in her white underdress, with her beautiful neck and arms uncovered, and her great masses of bright hair falling down her back from her compact little head like the tangled maze of a shock of corn. Julie was by her side, and they were deep in consultation on what she could wear to be married in. She shrank from appearing in a low dress to the rude gaze of a mixed crowd, many of whom had been her fellow-

servants, and deeply grieved the loss of the beautiful gown which Madame de Gros had fitted with her own hands. But Julie took a much harder and more practical view of matters, and returned to her opinion of the day before.

"Mademoiselle must wear her ball dress, in which she was *ravissante*; she was not to have the fear, such superb freshness could defy the strongest daylight, and besides, she would look a thousand times better in a low dress with her figure than in a stiff high one. What was the use of her having such a skin and such a figure as that, if it was to be all covered up; that was very well for women who had no skin and the bones that could be counted? Besides, mademoiselle was bound, for the credit of monsieur, to hold her own by the side of the lovely Miss Mary; and, moreover, the

contrast in their dress would be *vraiment artistique*, and would stop the 'nasty' comparison."

The allusion to Dick decided Jenny to sacrifice to the becoming her little dread of Nancy's ill-natured remarks, and her desire to be in the latest fashion. She was perfectly aware that she had looked remarkably well in her ball dress, and it was, fortunately, all white. She wanted however, to add some lace, Madame de Gros having gone to the height of the fashion. But Julie would not hear of it, it would spoil the dress, which was just right as it was; and when she was covered with her veil she would be the most beautiful bride that ever was seen.

The admiration of the dark-skinned Julie for her fair young friend and mistress was no doubt very genuine, but it is to be

feared she had a little of another quality to recommend her even to the astute Jenny, besides her friendship and her misfortunes. Nevertheless, Jenny had been allowed on the previous evening to be a very attractive creature, by those who admire a pure blonde of the robust order.

The two young heiress brides had thought it would be very nice to be married by the Archbishop, who had once passed a night at Whitepatch—or at least by the Dean. But the Colonel would not hear of such a thing, and he protested vigorously against the "mean practice" of snubbing your own clergyman for the sake of a smart announcement in the papers. Maxstead had christened Mary, prepared her for confirmation, and who knows in this world what else he might not be called upon to do for her, and he would

not have him put into the shade in this way for any one.

John Spillett had wished Jenny to be married from her own church, but Jenny held to being married with Miss Mary—as she still always called her—and it had been arranged that the old Rector was to perform the double ceremony at Whitepatch, assisted by the Rector of Ixstead.

Mary's bridesmaids were the two Miss Brambles, the two sisters of Sir Francis, Miss Grandison, and the young lady from Paris. Jenny's were her two little cousins from Boulogne — two of the Rector of Ixstead's daughters, and the two little nieces of the Hon. Dick.

The church had been charmingly decorated by the young ladies and gentlemen staying in the house, under the superintendence of the old Rector; and the path be-

tween the Manor-house and the church was thickly strewn with flowers on the morning of the wedding.

There had been some difficulty in arranging the two processions, but it was at last decided the Ixstead party was to enter by the large door under the tower, at the end of the church, and the party from Whitepatch by the principal door (which had a porch) in the nave. The pathway between the churchyard gate and the tower door was also strewn with flowers, and the tower had been gaily decorated with flags from Ixstead. Had not the Count himself come over for this purpose at a very early hour in the morning, astounding the natives by his daring flights in the air, and having his *café au lait* afterwards with the Rector. The procession at the Manor was to be in readiness to start as soon as the carriages

from Ixstead had arrived at the outer gate.

As the brides entered at the doors, Mary's fine organ,—which she had given to the church,—burst out with a most unaccustomed volume of melodious sounds, such as never had been heard in the old building before; but Monsieur de l'Orchestre had bundled the unfortunate school mistress out of her place, and presided at that instrument himself so greatly to the advantage of the occasion, that even Mary found time to wonder who it could possibly be that was playing her organ in such a magnificent manner.

The Hon. Dick, for once in his life, was very well dressed; but he had of late received several hints of remarkable frankness that "a man of his unimposing size couldn't afford to look as if he had slept in

his clothes," and he had been making great efforts to reform, though Mr. Finch had confided to Mr. Saunders that "we were not much better than we were before, and that if our coat was put on as smooth as a glove, ten minutes afterwards it would be all wrinkles up the back as if it had been stuffed into a carpet bag." But Jenny dearly loved her "good Dick," with all the strength of her honest and generous heart, and he soon learnt to take philosophically these sharp little pricks from her needle.

Sir Francis, also, was magnificent in a blue coat, in which his superb figure was seen to great advantage; and both bride-grooms were much approved of by the waiting crowd in the church as they stood before all eyes in the most embarrassing position a man has ever to take in the course of his life. It is no wonder men plead so hard for a quiet wedding!

As for the brides, nothing could have been more lovely or engaging than Mary in her bridal dress with her shy dark eyes and sweet pale face full of tender emotion; and Julie was right about Jenny. A most genuine woman did she look, her white shoulders gleaming beneath her veil, and her eyes shining with a frank happiness that seemed to be above all pretence of concealment.

The good old Rector stood ready to receive them, very smart in a new surplice and red hood. His kindly face had an expression of deep sympathy and interest, as the two brides advanced towards the altar, that no outsider could ever have shown.

Mary pronounced the word "obey" with clearness and decision; but the rebellious Jenny rather slurred it over; doubtless, however, she was reserving herself for

the sentence which follows "till death us do part," which she pronounced with much feeling and earnestness.

Monsieur de l'Orchestre gazed down on them a moment as they came out of the vestry, then muttering to himself according to his wont, "Elles sont ravissantes toutes les deux," he sprang to his seat and poured forth a glorious march as the two processions filed out together in the direction of the Manor-house.

As they sat down to breakfast, the sun shone brightly into the dining-room windows, and a reflected ray lit up the snow-white head of the fine old Colonel.

Lord Huntingcroft proposed the health of the newly married couples, which was responded to by Sir Francis and the Hon. Dick. The speech of Sir Francis was simple and manly, but Dick perhaps

carried off the honours as he thanked the assembled guests with much feeling in a few words for the kind way they had drunk the health of himself and—his dear wife—(turning to Jenny) and wished that every one present might be as happy as he felt at that moment! Sir Francis's best man proposed the bridesmaids, and the best man of the Hon. Dick responded with a humorous little squib in good taste befitting the occasion.

But the great speech was to come. Monsieur de l'Orchestre now started on his legs, and was received with cheers, as his genuine talent and earnestness of character had made him quite a popular personage. His speech, however, and manner of delivery was so highly comical, that not even the Colonel could preserve his gravity.

"Mesdames et messieurs, j'ai l'honneur to speak a leetle somthing. It is I speak inside all my hearts—to you. I am leetle artiste on-ly, but I hev *gret* heart! and I do say mesdames et messieurs, it touch me moch, oh, so deeps to see so moch happiness which I do see to-day (applause). For you, it is all the loffs—*j'en suis sure!* In my contree, helas! it is all the monies mostly —no monies, no the loffs, no the marriage. Here it is the loffs do com first, and the monies do com second. It is my most gret desire to marry som English laddie who will loff me verra moch (loud cheers)! Oh! it is bueti-ful sight what I do see to-day in the decayed church so full of the perceptions of the things which do go behind (suppressed laughter). Ah! you laff a leetle, but for me I do loff the things buried in the tomstone of the affection

and the poetics which I do perceive there" (loud laughter and cheers).

The Count and Countess regarded their compatriot with profound respect and admiration for his high accomplishment in making such a brilliant speech in English.

"Mesdames et messieurs! I do wish to the laddie brides and the gentlemen brides all the joys the big world has got in him (cheers). For the gentlemans, I do wish the bridles they mak for themselves to-day (loud laughter) will never be brocken ontil the childs of the grandchilds do hop up to them (laughter and cheers, and cries of order from the Colonel). For the laddies, I do wish they will liff as long as the gentlemans, and when the day of afflicting melancholy is com they shall go to run-away together from this glob on the same day, and be buried in the same deetch!"

(loud and prolonged cheers with great laughter).

Monsieur was much puzzled by the way his finest sentiments had been received, but he consoled himself by reflecting that these good English people always laughed at the "noble sentiment." He had spent several days, with the aid of a dictionary, in composing his speech, but he had crammed his brain with so many words bearing on the occasion and the ideas he wished to express, that he got into a slight confusion when the great moment arrived. He however was firmly convinced that he had shown a great mastery over "this terrible language." *

The Rector now proposed the health of

* This picture of Monsieur de l'Orchestre may seem absurd and unnatural for a Frenchman of his talent, but it is drawn from life, and monsieur came from Provence.

the Colonel, which was enthusiastically received, especially by the younger members, and to which he replied with much spirit and feeling. The breakfast then terminated; the travelling dresses were put on, and the usual wild assault on the eyes of the departing lovers took place—a custom which not even this abolishing age has yet dared to abolish—and why should it? It is a very pretty sight after all, and speeds the parting pair.

It had been arranged the two couples were to post separately to Canterbury, dine there together, and proceed by the night mail to Calais. Sir Francis and Mary were to go on to Paris, and Dick and his wife, it was understood, were to proceed by easy stages into Normandy, and after making a sketching tour in that refreshing country, were to dazzle their

simple relations at Boulogne. It has, however, been whispered that the two couples, or some people very like them, were seen for several weeks together exactly at this period visiting the sights of Paris in the daytime, and occupying boxes together at the various theatres and operas in the evening. But surely this must have been idle gossip; Lady Wyldeman would never have committed herself to such a highly improper proceeding.

"But the dresses, sir?"

Madam, I am not a man milliner, nor a reporter for a fashionable newspaper. Let it suffice that the ladies present did not find many faults, and those were not very serious; but I have a clear recollection that Mary went off in something very simple, in which she looked extremely charming, and Jenny, in something soft in blue and

green (I think), which was very becoming, and set off her fair hair and complexion to great advantage. But even if I were able to give an exact description of them they would appear to you now horribly old-fashioned and dowdy, as it takes at least twenty years to make an old fashion again bearable.

A short account, however, of the presents at a county wedding even a few years ago must not be omitted—for ten years now produce as great a change as fifty—or a hundred—in former times! They were spread out on several large tables in the hall, Jenny's as well as Mary's, at Mary's particular request.

There were nineteen clocks, twenty-six pairs of bedroom candlesticks, six complete sets of breakfast services, at the least twenty blotting books, nine complete

sets of writing paraphernalia in various materials, five tea caddies, an indescribable number of articles of the Minton kind, chiefly remarkable for their close resemblance to each other; most of these were from the tenants, servants, and small neighbours; bracelets, rings, and other costly articles of jewellery; two Bibles, sent by Mrs. Crippin to Sir Francis and the Hon. Dick; a charming little set of gardening tools for Mary, from the head gardener, who had been fifty-one years at the Manor; a rare first edition of Handel's works, elaborately bound in several volumes for Mary, and a very dashing and dainty driving whip for Jenny from the old Rector; a superb new cage for Solomon for Mary, and a complete case of homœopathic medicines with book for family practice for Jenny, from Harrison; a beautiful

Dutch work basket in brass and wicker from Miss Van Tromp, who was unable to be present; a curious present for Mary, which caused some astonishment by its elegance, came from Mungham the cowman, who had been forty years at the Manor, this was the hoof of a favourite Guernsey heifer of Mary's, which had been killed by an accident, set in silver as a watch-stand; a silver thimble and needle-case for Mary from Sarah, now Mrs. Solestreet; and half a dozen pocket-handkerchiefs beautifully worked with her new cypher from Miss Ransome, a present which gave Mary much pleasure; a case of scissors in all sizes, also for Mary, sent by the neglected Lady Worthingham, at which the Colonel looked rather guiltily; a charming collection of airs to be played on the organ, bound in white, for Mary, and a fine old French

chatelaine in silver for Jenny from Monsieur de l'Orchestre; and last and most sensational of all, a lovely cradle for Mary from the cottagers, according to old custom at the Manor, which arrived immediately after the wedding, to the great amusement of the assembled guests. The Hon. Mrs. Dick whispered, blushing, to Lady Doddingstead-Wyldeman, "that it was ridiculous, but that she would not have minded having one either."

Dick's friends at once christened his wife, the "Hon. Mrs. Dick." She was greatly admired by them, and had been fought for desperately at the dance a few nights before. The friends of Sir Francis thought Mary a lovely and interesting girl, but her shyness made them more afraid of her, though they had infinitely more reason to be afraid of Jenny, thereby showing the usual

penetration of this discriminating world—which opinion any charming young lady under the lock and key of this tyrannical infliction, will doubtless cordially endorse.

CONCLUSION.

Two things have always struck the writer with much force. One is, the ghostlike appearance of the personages of a story, when they again present themselves in a subsequent work. To the author, doubtless, they are old friends, in whose society he has passed many a happy hour of quiet toil, and he delights in seeing them again; not so the general public, who know them only as the chance acquaintances of an hour, to be more or less remembered according to their individuality. The other is, the disappointment one sometimes feels in saying farewell to the characters in a

novel, without knowing what becomes of them afterwards.

To begin at the bottom of the scale then, Mr. Finch made a shocking *mésalliance* and lost caste for ever in his own set by falling a victim to the charms of that very pretty kitchen maid, Ruth. Mr. Saunders at present occupies with his charming French wife that excellent country inn much frequented by commercial travellers, called the Dairy Maid and Rising Sun, the property of John Spillett, Esq., of Ixstead, in the county of Kent, and the Hon. Mrs. Huntingcroft, daughter of John Spillett, Esq., is the godmother of his eldest child. The present housekeeper at Whitepatch is the second wife of Mr. Harrison the butler. She is a fine well-built woman, with a very amiable face, and gives great "satisfaction to her employers." It is to be feared, how-

ever, that her health is not quite satisfactory, notwithstanding her robust appearance, as she is perpetually taking medicine out of little bottles she carries in her pocket. George the footman has been jilted by a girl called Nancy, for his brother footman John; it is supposed, however, that the girl Nancy committed this wanton act to show a former fellow servant with whom John had been much in love, that she was not the only woman in the world.

That charming and cheerful little corner residence, with windows looking in all directions, known as No. 999, King's Parade, Brighton, is at present occupied by a maiden lady of good position and her attached maid. These two pass a most delightful time with an unlimited supply of new novels and shop windows. The attached maid, notwithstanding a certain

vinegar aspect, manages her mistress's little household with great honesty and some skill, thereby saving her from distraction from her literary pursuits. This maiden lady has been lately receiving a visit from her niece, with her husband and three children, the youngest of which,—a magnetically sweet and tender little sprite, with dark thoughtful eyes and bright fair hair—is called after her, and will probably some day receive the nice little fortune of her great aunt and godmother. Her father, also, is with her for a short time, though located at the Old Ship Hotel, not many doors off. He looks the model of dignity and calm self-restraint and is treated with profound respect by the fine old man-of-wars-man porter in the hall. When he is alone in his country seat, she always goes home to take care him.

The good Rector has passed away, and his nephew reigns in his stead. He is a terrible thorn in the side of his patron, Colonel Doddingstead, with his perpetual schemes for repewing the church and introducing "ritualistic practices." The Hon. Mrs. Huntingcroft, however, on a recent visit to Whitepatch, shot at this zealous young gentleman such a keenly-barbed hint on his want of tact and good taste, that he has "decided" to wait until the death of the "venerable Colonel;" which nevertheless does not seem at all likely to happen at present, to judge by the vigorous way in which he still takes his early walk before breakfast in all weathers. John Spillett, Esq., of Ixstead, since the recovery of his property, has taken ardently to hunting and shooting, and is always a very welcome and popular person in his

part of the world. He gives his opinion modestly, but he rides well, and is the best judge of a horse in all the country round. But to this day he persists in addressing his neighbour, Colonel Doddingstead, as "sir."

Sir Francis and his friend Dick established their wives in excellent houses in town not far from each other. Their beauty and romantic history made them the lionesses of nearly the quarter of a season. Jenny is always surrounded with men, though she favours most the clever ones. She has renounced her forced imitations of Mr. Poyser, but her "unruly tongue" has lost nothing of its vigour. She has, however, so far, preserved herself from the least breath of scandal; and as for Mary, one would as soon suspect an archbishop of impropriety as Lady Wyldeman.

Jenny beat her friend in the honours of

maternity by at least six weeks. She had three girls in succession, and though all promised to be very good looking—one in particular, who was like herself—she was not content. At last came a boy, who, though not at present a beauty, is a vigorous and healthy little fellow enough, and the greatest personage in the whole world. Never were such rejoicings as took place at his christening, when the Colonel and Lord Huntingcroft stood as his godfathers, with Mary as his godmother. Mary's two boys are fine, mischievous little scamps, the spur and the delight of their great-grandfather, who is completely their slave; though, alas! the second boy is a Wyldeman, and like his grandfather Sir John, and the eldest is like himself with marked eyebrows. But things never *will* fit in exactly in this world!

Jenny and Mary pass much of their time in Kent, giving frequent balls and parties, to the great enlivenment of the neighbourhood. Monsieur de l'Orchestre is often down there, and is always given the Prophet's Chamber. Being enticed out to follow "le sport" on a recent occasion, he nearly shot a gamekeeper; but, nothing daunted, he means to try it again should any one ask him! He *did* marry an English wife, who is half a head taller than himself, and of whom he is extremely proud. She is certainly a fine young woman, with a pleasant countenance. He has a very pretty home at Hampstead, where he persists in living, notwithstanding the inconvenient distance, "to be in the hevan abov the smok"—which is nearly the only thing in England he really detests. Don Carlos still jogs sturdily along in his usual way,

sounding his beautiful tones in anything but correct time, but his old master grieves to think what will happen to him when he is gone. Solomon is the delight of Mary's children, though he sometimes inform them that their mother "has gone off with a gentleman." But parrots have a remarkably tenacious memory for inconvenient things!

The brig *Charlotte Maria*, of Whitby, foundered on the Goodwins within twenty miles of Whitepatch, and all hands were lost, in the heavy gale which arose on the night of Mary's adventures in the secret passages. Mrs. Walker is still a wanderer from place to place, with an ever-increasing sense of the burden of life. But Harrison has offered to assist her in setting up a lodging-house at Deal, if she will only

listen to reason and be content to govern a smaller dominion.

The maiden of the east stairs has been seen once or twice, but the spirit of Richard Doddingstead has never appeared again, neither has the terrible ghost of Van Goyen; and honest peace and happiness reign over Whitepatch.

THE END.

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